Treasures in the snow: What do I know and how do I know it through my educational inquiry into my practice of community

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TREASURES IN THE SNOW: WHAT DO I KNOW AND HOW DO I KNOW IT THROUGH MY EDUCATIONAL INQUIRY INTO MY PRACTICE OF COMMUNITY

Submitted by
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for the degree of PhD
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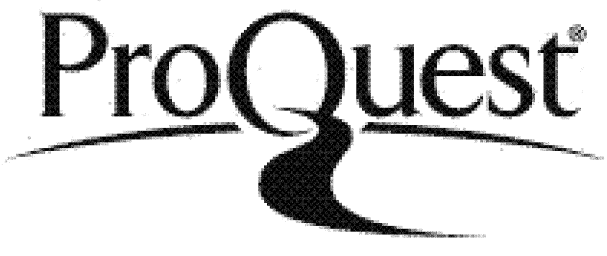

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ABSTRACT

The originality of mind and critical judgment demonstrated in this thesis are focused on the growth, development, and recognition of my educational knowledge as a professional educator.

I demonstrate how a teacher researcher can create her own knowledge through a combining and recombining practice, personal creativity, intuition, theoretical frameworks, and critical judgement in various degrees at different times. Set in a narrative context, I present a living picture of helping to form and work with communities of students, parents, teachers, and teacher researchers which provides the life-situations in which I created my own knowledge and strive to identify and live out my values.

This thesis shows an alternative to traditional forms of criticism frequently found in academic work related to the growth of knowledge. This alternative is a written representation of my values that I use as my living standards of practice and judgment in the self-study of my professional practice.

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FOREWORD

I think it's most helpful to the reader if the author gives some background about the writer and the written piece before plunging into the text. As you will see as you read through this thesis, I live in Alaska. My husband, Ken, and I moved here from Ohio twenty-six years ago and fell in love with Fairbanks. We built our house ourselves, raised two sons, and learned to enjoy the winter cold as well as the endless summer days.

I've not always been an educator. Before my life as a teacher, I had my own dressmaking business where I designed and made wedding gowns. I loved being a fairy godmother to all the brides, but after a number of years I realized I was not meant to be a business person. Next I went to technical school and trained to be a medical secretary. It was in this profession that I came to understand I needed to do something more creative with my life, so when my sons were nine and eleven years old, I returned to college to obtain my degree in education. I graduated from the University of Alaska Fairbanks with a bachelor's in education degree.

I'm currently a practicing teacher for kindergarten through eight grade in a public charter school in Fairbanks, Alaska. As a cofounder of Chinook Charter School, the first charter school in Alaska, I helped to write the charter, develop the school's curriculum, and create the state's process for charter approval. My duties at Chinook include teaching all subject areas, being politically active with issues concerning the school, mentoring preservice teachers, and sharing all the administrative duties with my fellow teachers. My Chinook colleagues and I also facilitate a very active and supportive parent community.

Before my involvement with Chinook, I taught for fifteen years in the Fairbanks North Star Borough School District. I've worked with students ranging from nine to thirteen years old in five different schools. Along with being a classroom teacher, I've also been a grade level team leader, advisor to student councils, chair of various committees, superintendent advisory board representative, and a principal designee in the principal's absence.

I also teach preservice teachers in the evenings at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. Twice a week for the past ten years, I've worked with education students in the area of literacy. I have the joy of seeing my university students teach all over the state of Alaska, and now many of them are in a position to mentor new preservice teachers.

As an active teacher researcher in the Alaska Teacher Research Network (ATRN), I've had the privilege of sharing such topics as facilitating community, creating portfolios for student self-assessment, and developing teacher research groups at local, state, national, and international conferences. Some of my international presentations include the S-Step Castle Conferences in East Sussex, England; the World Congress 3 for Action Research in Bath, England; the International Symposium for Action Research in Washington, the International Reading Association World Congress in Hawaii; and the Canadian Council of Teachers of English in Montreal, Quebec.

On the national level, some of my sharing opportunities have included the American Education Research Association conferences in various locations; the Whole Language Umbrella Conference in Washington, DC; the International Reading Association in various locations; the Living the Question Institute in Maine; the Ethnography Forum at the University of Pennsylvania; and the Hawaiian Writing Project in Hawaii.

Alaska is a small state in terms of population but large in terms of providing additional learning opportunities for teachers. I've had the privilege of traveling to many school districts throughout the state to share topics such as developing community within the classroom, process reading and writing, and teacher research. I've also shared these topics at the Bilingual Multicultural Education Equity Conferences, the State Reading Conferences, and many local professional development days.

I've had the opportunity to publish my work in a variety of places. My account of ATRN's development is shared in John Loughran's (1999) *Researching Teaching*. The journal *The Far Vision, The Close Look* is produced and edited by ATRN, and each of the four volumes contains an account of my research. My book, *Changing the View* (Austin, 1994), was a result of my teacher research on student assessment. I've also had articles that focus on the aspects of conducting teacher research in *Teacher Research: The Journal of Classroom Inquiry.*

In addition, I've been involved in many other aspects of the educational profession. As part of my master's degree, I co-created a statewide whole language institute. This continued for three years after the initial development year. I also helped introduce the whole language process to each school in my district. As co-coordinator for ATRN, I helped to create the first state conference for teacher researchers. I've served on the governing body for the State Writing Consortium and traveled around

the state working with teachers and the writing process. At the school board's request, I served on public hearings concerning a controversial literacy issue. I have also been on curriculum revision committees, piloted new texts, and mentored numerous preservice teachers.

Outside of my regular teaching responsibilities at Chinook and the University of Alaska, I'm currently a charter school consultant for the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory where I helped to design and teach a program for helping educators create charter schools. I'm also serving as chair for the Self Study of Teacher Education Practices, a special-interest group in the American Education Research Association.

Being a continual learner is important to me. I couldn't be involved in all the aspects of education that I am if I didn't continue to grow in my understanding of teaching. So after completing my master's degree with a focus on language and literacy in 1989, and being fully immersed in teacher research, I decided to continue my learning by working on my doctoral degree in education. I thoroughly examined several graduate programs and applied to the University of Bath, England, for several reasons.

First, I didn't want to stop working with my students. They are my collaborators in research, and the classroom is my laboratory. (Also, I couldn't afford to stop working!) The Bath program would allow me to register as a part-time graduate student and correspond by fax and e-mail. Second, as a teacher researcher, I wanted a program that would support me in the continuation of my qualitative, self-reflective style of research. Third, since I strongly believe that teachers create valuable knowledge and should share it with the educational community, I needed a program that honors and respects teachers. And finally, I wanted to work with a person whom I could admire professionally and personally. The program at Bath University was exactly what I wanted. Jack Whitehead, my advisor, has supported and guided my efforts during the entire process.

Being a full-time teacher and a part-time student on an international scale has been exciting, stressful, and mind broadening. The research shared in this thesis was done with eleven through thirteen-year-olds in a traditional public school located on a military base here in Fairbanks. All my work recorded in this account has been done while teaching a full day. I read and write in snatches—before school, during silent reading and writing in the classroom, in the evenings (except on Fridays when I fall asleep on the couch), and on Saturdays and Sundays. I've had the privilege of learning

from friends throughout the world: my students and my research colleagues from my support group in Alaska; through the wonders of e-mail, Jack, Moira Laidlaw, Pat D'Arcy, Ben Cunningham, and others in the "lands beyond" offered advice and direction; and, thanks to my husband, Ken, I've had the wonderful privilege of spending the summers in Bath to engage in face-to-face conversations with my British support group.

As you read this account, you'll notice there are three different styles of print. The reason for this is explained later, but you need to know now that my narrative is written in standard type, *my internal thoughts are in italics,* and **my discoveries (the ideas that suddenly occur to me as I write) are in bold letters.**

The idea for this dissertation began through discussions Jack and I were having about the issues of community in my classroom, my teacher research network in Alaska, and the parents of my students. I remember sitting in Jack's office chatting about some of my concerns; he was at his desk and I was in the chair underneath the overloaded bookshelves. *I think it might be safer if I sit over by Moira's computer next time I come. I'm not so sure about these bookshelves.* Jack interrupted my thoughts about personal safety when he said, "Terri, I would like to suggest . . . here's what you might want to do. Give an account of how you create community with your classroom. Make the details so clear that the reader can live it with you. Oh, and be as creative as you wish." I politely nodded, but my eyes glazed over. *Jack, do you know what that means! It would be like walking back to Alaska and describing every twist and turn of the road, every sign, every house along the way. And on top of that, be creative!*

That's where I began. I don't remember walking home from Jack's office. I do remember not sleeping much that night. My mind wouldn't stop wrestling with possible ideas. *How can I identify and explain clearly (and clearly is the ultimate task) that "something" that is so much a part of what I do during my teaching day that it's hard to separate out from everything else? How can I begin and what will make sense to the reader?* I tossed away my first three writing attempts and walked endlessly in the park. By now I had not only trained my feet to follow a regular walking pattern so I could think, but I walked there so often the ducks and squirrels waved as I passed by. Somehow I could always create wonderful beginnings while walking, but they didn't look quite as wonderful on my computer screen. I sent my husband on numerous trips so I could have the apartment to myself. I ate my way through a pound of grapes, one large package of shortbread cookies, and three bananas before I finally found a solution.

I begin by sharing with you three stories I've often told when I talk about critical events in my teaching career. To invite you into my thinking process, I share my inner thoughts by typing them in italics. As I finished the first story, I realized there was a third "voice". I was seeing new ideas and new connections as I wrote. It seemed logical to put these thoughts in bold print. This was the turning point. Once I saw the possibilities of my three voices, thoughts and ideas jumped from my head to the screen. It somehow all fit together, as if the ideas were just waiting to be dusted off and tried on.

So, as I share my work with you, I believe I add to the "scholarly space" (Fenstermacher, 1997, p. xiii) and present two distinctive and original contributions to educational knowledge:

The first is the creation of my own knowledge through the mixing and blending of practice, personal creativity, intuition, and theoretical frameworks. It's based on what Jack Whitehead (1993) refers to as "living educational theory" (p. 68). I show how my living theory develops through critical examination. This thesis is a visual account of how I not only apply knowledge, but generate new understandings through the examination of my actions, my in-process thinking, and my reflections. I believe my work, as presented here, is an example of the new scholarship, as suggested by Schon (1995), by demonstrating the combining of theoretic understandings with my "generation of actionable knowledge" (p. 34).

The second original contribution concerns criticism. I offer an alternative form of criticism based and represented by my values that I use as my living standards of practice and judgement. This thesis models the fundamental concepts of community illustrated in my research. By combining the basic elements of community with my values, I present an alternative to the type of criticism usually found in academic work.

Also through intentional construction of this text, I make my thinking visible to enable you, the reader, to join me in my considerations of the moment. By recording my visible thinking and the accounts of my research concerning community, I make my work available for reflection and discussion by my colleagues. Through this teacher-research study, I demonstrate what is possible for other teacher researchers, and finally, I gain new self understandings through the process of writing this thesis.

So I invite you to join me as I share my stories, my thoughts, and my discoveries.

CHAPTER 1
WELCOMING COMMUNITY: A PERSONAL INVITATION

Note to the Reader

In this chapter, I offer an invitation to you, the reader, to share my journey as I work to create and facilitate four different communities. I begin our time together by presenting my two original contributions to educational knowledge and end the chapter by discussing the issues of audience and standards of judgment.

There are two basic purposes of this chapter. The first is to begin a relationship between you as the reader and myself as the author. I attempt to initiate a relationship by writing in such a way as to make my thinking and actions clear to you.

The other purpose of this chapter is to show you the process of my coming to understand and know. My continual self questioning leads to examining my actions and thinking, and this usually leads to directly (conversations or observations) or indirectly (reading) seeking more information from others. Considering all these thoughts and asking myself more questions, I formulate a new idea and/or a plan of action. This in turn leads to more self questioning, and the cycle continues. This picture models my action research process throughout the entire thesis.

As the title of this section states, this is a personal invitation to you, the reader, to join me in my adventures concerning the topic of community. Before we begin, however, I would like to share some background information that I believe you will find helpful in fully understanding the work presented in the following chapters. In the first part of this chapter, I present my two distinctive and original contributions to educational knowledge: the creation of my own knowledge and an alternative form of criticism. Then in the final part of this section, I discuss the issues of audience and validity.

There is a tension between a text format like this, which suggests a linear relationship, and the interrelatedness of each of my contributions. They don't fall into clean, precise categories, but intertwine like a tangle of yarn. A tug on a single loop changes the whole, and it was the same with my research. As I was focusing on the individual communities, changes were taking place within myself as I began to examine my beliefs and identify my values. Those personal changes influenced my work with each of the communities. All of this was influenced by my growing awareness of the merging of my professional and personal life. And finally, my understanding of community as well as awareness of my values greatly influenced how this thesis was constructed. Eraut (1994), in discussing the difficulties in determining professional knowledge, points out that 'experts often cannot explain the nature of their own expertise" (p. 102). A great deal of my struggle within the issue of representation is addressing Eraut's concern. I not only attempt to clearly articulate my work with the four different communities but also attempt to show the development of my internal process of discovery and understanding and the influence that has on my work with the issue of community.

I began this study with a fairly straightforward vision. I planned to critically examine how I could develop a community within my classroom and then see if I could transpose my newly acquired knowledge to help facilitate other communities. The body of this thesis is an account of my research concerning four communities. In Chapter 3, I recount my efforts at creating a cooperative community in my classroom of upper elementary students. I then share my attempts to apply my understanding gained from my classroom experiences to three other groups. In Chapter 4, I share my work with the parents of my students. Then, in Chapter 5, I discuss my attempts to facilitate a school colleague community. Finally, in Chapter 7, I explain my efforts to build community with the Alaska Teacher Research Network (ATRN).

What I didn't foresee was the significance of the creation of my own knowledge and the impact of the identification of my values. It is within these two elements that I claim to add my original contributions to educational knowledge.

Claim 1: Creation of Knowledge: Moving Forward By Questioning

The ability to move deeply into my work to identify my core values came from asking myself questions. Self-questioning allows me to consciously add to my knowledge as I attempt to solve my intellectual questions (Elmore, 1991). This never-ending problem-solving approach helps me to develop what I identify as inner control. It's the mental process of stepping outside myself in order to critically self examine. But it's more than just a step outside, it's my deliberate purposeful action of doing so. Elmore (1991) contends that "teaching, it seems, is a struggle for mastery not only of content and craft, but also of self" (p. xv), and I work to master an understanding of myself for the purpose of improving my understanding of teaching and improving my ability to teach.

I began this process when I experienced one of my first feelings of teaching dissonance described in the story of the Word Munchers, Chapter 3. I visually knew how I wanted the writing groups to be, but in reality they weren't matching my picture. My question is always, how do I get the students from where they are now to my ideal picture? My reflective self moved in as I questioned myself, looking for multiple sources of information. I thought about each individual student and how they interacted with each other. I thought about my past experience. How did I interact with my colleagues? What did we do when things weren't going well and how did we continue when problems occurred? Is this similar to anything I've encountered before? Have I read something that might help my thinking? Who might know something about this? Is there anyone I know that I can talk this over with to clarify my thoughts or to hear their thinking? How can I write about it, what can I say now? How do my values fit this situation? I found I continually had this same type of questioning with myself during each part of my study (and with all aspects of teaching). I used these questions as my basis to check and search. With each question, I gained a little knowledge. Put all together, I stepped forward in knowledge–sometimes in tiny increments, sometimes in giant leaps.

According to Eraut (1994), we all are surrounded and attached to the "continuous flow of experience", but it is when the individual experiences are examined through reflection and synthesized into a larger collection of actions that

higher levels of meaning occur (p. 104). By purposely posing explicit questions to myself, noting patterns and discerning connections, I attempted to capture and examine Eraut's flow of experience. I taught myself how to really see the happenings in the classroom. In Chapter 2, I explain how I begin to use sociolinguistics, proximics, and kinesics to guide my observations. I also taught myself how to listen with my heart and how to question the drama of the day.

I asked myself hard questions about my actions and my beliefs and examined how this knowledge influenced the learning with the classroom through consistent memo writing (Hubbard & Power, 1993) to myself and interaction with other teacher researchers. It was within my personal memos that I looked for threads of connection between the events of the days, my actions, my beliefs, my prior knowledge and experience, and the knowledge of others. And it was through interactions with my research colleagues, both in person and through writings, that I weighed, reformulated, extended my thoughts, and of course asked new questions.

The process of self-questioning gives me a sense of empowerment and confidence. I am in charge of my own learning and I assume that responsibility. I gain insight from others through discussions and readings, and I use that information to inform my thinking, but in the end, I create my own knowledge by blending that "outside" information with the awareness I gain from practicing the inner control of questioning.

At this point in my life, this type of internal thinking is so much a part of me that I do it unconsciously. As I work with various communities, I continually weigh my prior knowledge, including an understanding of my values, with my instant observations to create my immediate response as well as to formulate my daily and long-term plans. As you read this study, you'll notice I changed my afternoon plans as a result of student reaction to Sean, I modified my weekly intention for each Wednesday class based on the way the teachers entered the room, and I responded to Susan stealing tokens in a humorous manner based on my understanding of the ATRN members present. I believe I'm demonstrating and living what Schon (1983) refers to as artistic performance:

> His artistry is evident in his selective management of large amounts of information, his ability to spin out long lines of inventions and inference, and his capacity to hold several ways of looking at things at once without disrupting the flow of inquiry. (p. 130)

I tell my preservice teachers that it's like dividing my brain into several parts, where all parts think independently yet work together to formulate an instant plan of action. While I'm considering the best way to structure interactions based on my immediate observations and prior knowledge, I'm also questioning myself about the person sitting on the edge of the group and how to include him, how best to share the content information of the lesson based on the atmosphere in the room, how to encourage all to equally and openly participate, and how to deal with the time constraints. All this questioning and thinking is happening simultaneously. It impacts my actions and is done while I conduct all the other duties of teaching.

Again, it's making the inner thinking explicit that is difficult. Schon (1987) and Polanyi (1958) both believe there are acts that individuals perform but find difficult to accurately describe. Schon is sometimes criticized for not being totally clear on how one goes about reflecting-in-action (Tremmel, 1993). I believe this thesis shows how inner thinking and reflection-in-action can be made visible. By taking you inside my head, I show you my thoughts as I use my intuition, creativity, theory, and past practices to build communities. In the accounts of the four communities, I give examples of how my internal thinking influenced my actions, and results in the creation of new understanding about the community and myself.

Claim 2: An Alternative Form of Criticism: Living My Values Through Representation

Education is a huge and multifaceted profession. A glance through the American Educational Research Association (AERA) proceedings illustrates the diversity within this field. In examining the focus of each of the twelve AERA divisions, which range from administration to history and historiography, from counciling to educational policy, plus the individual emphasis of the one hundred fourteen special interest groups, it's evident education is filled with many viewpoints and interests.

Robert Donmoyer, editor of *Educational Researcher Journal*, shows how varied educational perspectives are through a series of articles written by past presidents of AERA. Focusing on the issue of research, their opinions about the needs and the direction of educational research span a spectrum which include formulating comprehensive theories from past generalizations (Gage, 1997), exposing

epistemological racism within research (Scheurich & Young, 1997), and debating the merits of alternative forms of research (Smith, 1997).

Donmoyer (1996) adds yet another dimension to this discussion with his concern of Balkanization. He point out the "significant diversity" within the singular field of qualitative research as well as the difficulty that arises in communication with others of different viewpoints. Donmoyer also notes the tendency for like-minded educators to congregate together and not actively converse with others outside their mindset. This is clearly illustrated in articles by St. Pierre (2000) and Pillow (2000). In their responses to an article by Mark Constas (1998), they strongly point out a lack of understanding by Constas regarding their research positions. The authors find it difficult to see the viewpoint of the other.

As illustrated above, I realize I'm presenting my work at a time when the academic world is not united in a professional vision. So many practices lead to a feeling of disunity. Debate swirls around many issues such as the role of research, quantitative or qualitative methods, validity. And as Denzin and Lincoln (1994) point out, within each of these specific educational areas, there are still further multiple views and existing tensions.

Denzin (2000) reminds us that words effect people and that words do matter. Educators are quite skilled in using words to exchange ideas and views. Consider the many educational journals, the vast array of newly published books, as well as the thousands of verbal presentations given in the myriad of conferences each year. In *The Argument Culture*, Deborah Tannen (1998) points out that the words used within these educational arenas shape our views of how we perceive the profession. Looking through a single 1999 issue of the Educational Researcher Journal, I found words such as debate, argue, dispute, critique. The major strands at AERA are called divisions. These are words which are based on challenge and attack and encourage segmentation (Tannen, 1998). She also points out the difficulty in learning from others when engaging in such a challenging stance.

In an attempt to live my values within this written work, I am offering an alternative to those traditional forms of criticism frequently found in the academic work that Tannen describes. In an effort to "use language in a way that brings people together" (Denzin, 2000, p. 899), I've carefully crafted this thesis in an effort to create a living community with you, the reader. Rather than presenting the traditional form of criticism, I'm offering the elements of language, positioning, interest, and space as creative alternatives.

Language

In this document, I attempt to use language to build a relationship among you, the reader; myself; and the researchers I cite. I view this document as a beginning community for us all. In thinking about how to use language to best support a beginning community, I tried to replicate those words I used with all four of the communities described in my research. I use words such as "we", "us", and "our" to draw you into my thinking and the immediate situation. When I quoted other researchers, I concentrated on considerate words like "states", "suggests", and "explains" rather than combative words like "argues" or "challenges". My purpose with language was to create a supportive atmosphere throughout the text. I placed as much attention on this aspect of my thesis as I did in creating an inviting environment in my classroom and for the other communities discussed in the following chapters.

The other aspect to language is the use of the Alaska metaphor that flows through this entire account. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) point out that metaphors often create rapport and can help "in communicating the nature of unshared experiences" (p. 231). I've found using metaphors a wonderful tool to enter into an easy relationship with unknown audiences. As I share my Alaskan stories as metaphors to my research, I am attempting to clear a possible path to for us, you and I, to begin to make personal connections (Jones, 1991).

I purposely chose Alaska as the uniting metaphor so that you would come to know me. Like the overnight experience with my sixth graders that I share in Chapter 3 and the parent picnic on my back porch recounted in Chapter 4, I'm inviting you into my life as a way to begin community. Another reason for using Alaska as the theme of this thesis is to offer a softer and more inviting way into my research accounts.

Positioning

A second alternative to traditional criticism is through the use of what I call positioning. It's how I place my work in relationship to others. As mentioned earlier, Tannen describes educational research as a battle of contrasts in which someone's work must be proven wrong to show the rightness of your own. In attempting to align this thesis with my values, I've carefully focused on the aspect of relationships rather than the aspects of contrasts. Throughout this text, you'll find other researchers who have stimulated my thinking. I show how I've considered their ideas, how I've

adapted various aspects of their thinking to my context, and how I combined their ideas with my own. This, then, led me into new ideas and new understandings about community. I view the researchers mentioned in this thesis as friends who I would invite to dinner for great conversations (Hubbard & Power, 1993).

Interest

The term community is a very broad one. In *New Horizons in the Study of Language and Mind*, Chomsky (2000) points out the difficulty in clearly understanding a broad concept like community. He explains, "In particular, reference to 'misuse of language', to 'norm', to 'communities', and so on seems to me to require much more care than is often taken" (27). He goes on to note that without a personal interest in a specific community, the term is too vague to be of value (Chomsky, 31). Montessori (1959) explains that when a particular sensitiveness to or interest in a subject is aroused, "it is like a light that shines on some objects but not on others" (51). In this thesis, I'm attempting to illuminate my interest and sensitivity in community for you the reader, not only through my narratives of my work with communities, but through the ways I've constructed this text.

This text is purposely constructed using the values I hold in conjunction with community. As a professional educator and teacher researcher, I've come to understand the importance of identifying and living my values. It's been through the work with the four communities that I've challenged myself to closely examine my beliefs in order to fully understand my practice and myself. This process allows me to creatively struggle with moments of internal dissonance, and as a result, I've pushed myself to re-examine my values, to critically see my practice, and to reconsider my direction. I believe my values not only define my interest and creates specificity for the element of community as described and lived in this thesis, but are my standards of judgment from which I assess my actions and practice.

Space

The final alternative to traditional criticism is what I call space. It's my belief that there is room for multiple voices within educational discussions and educational research. In a recent article, David Coulter (1999) notes the importance of moving beyond the singular viewpoint of the monologue to create a genuine interchange between a number of people to gain new understandings. Tannen (1998) points out that polarization is often the result of the continual use of the monologue, and finally

Robert Donmoyer (1996) shows how polarization can occur as a result of like-minded individuals clustering together when he discusses the occurrence of Balkanization. I share my research not only in an attempt to add another and a different voice to educational discussions but as a creator and facilitator of community. I attempt to show ways, through my accounts of four different communities, in which various viewpoints can be recognized, listened to, and included.

It is within this whirlwind of discussion that I place my action research study. I present this thesis as a qualitative study of my work as a teacher researcher, and I have included the standards by which I wish to be judged. These include the University of Bath's standards of originality of mind and critical judgment. It is my hope that this thesis will not only add to the conversation but also broaden our understanding within our profession.

Standards of Judgment

Within the qualitative research field, the issue of validity is another area of uncertainty. Here again the opinions differ widely. Tickle (1995) suggests a very precise list of sixteen qualitative attributes, while Jane O'Dea (1994) calls broadly for truth and authenticity. With no universally accepted guideline, Altheide and Johnson (1994), Eisner (1997), and others continue to question and probe the issue of validity.

As I share my work with you, I am aware I'm placing my action research study among these varied perspectives found within the education profession. The myriad of voices personally challenge me as a teacher researcher to thoughtfully examine my work as well as the work of others in relation to the field of education as a whole.

In considering the issue of validity, I return to my two original contributions to educational knowledge - creating my own knowledge and offering an alternative form of criticism. These are based on personal creativity balanced with the attempts to live out of my values. Patterson and Shannon (1993) contend that an explicit and well understood philosophical point of view guides the quality of the study. I concur and believe that the comprehension of my creative process in coming to know as well as a continual awareness of my values lead me to particular views of validity. I move away from the positivist stance of Miles and Huberman (1984) to the reconceptialized view by Patti Lather:

> Contrary to dominant validity practices where the rhetorical nature of scientific claims is masked with methodological assurances, a strategy of ironic validity proliferates forms, recognizing that they are rhetorical and without foundation, postepistemic, lacking in epistemological support. The text is resituated as a representation of its "failure to represent what it points toward but can never reach . . . : (Lather, 1994, p. 40-41, in Donmoyer, 1996).

Use of Language

As a standard of judgment, I am attempting to use language in such a way as to make my thinking visible. One of my struggles with writing this thesis concerns the clarity necessary in helping you and I to fully understand my actions, perceptions, and creation of new knowledge. Eisner (1997) supports my dilemma when he points out that some educators are questioning how "we perform the magical feat of transforming the contents of our consciousness into a public form that others can understand" (p. 4). I attempt to make that transformation by being aware of my thinking to purposely make my inner thoughts explicit and by constructing the writing to invite you, the reader, into my work. But as Lather (1994) suggests, language is an insufficient tool for this. It cannot fully describe my complete thinking process as I work to define, express, and communicate my identified values within this thesis. Nor can written words suitably explain my thinking as I become linked to the actions, works, and nonverbal language of others, as well as myself.

Add to the dilemma of the limitations of written words, Lather's view of concepts as a connection of a "tangled mass of ideas" (Lather 1994, p. 45). My actions, situations, and thoughts are all interconnected, dependent yet interdependent. They don't exist in isolation or in a tidy straight line as the writing on a page tends to imply. I recognize the limitations of text, but I also realize written language is a tool which makes sharing with you possible and I've attempted to make it as clear and lucid as possible.

In addition, the ideas presented here can only be "mapped, not blueprinted" (Lather 1994, p. 45). Since this is a personal documentation of my development, this isn't a study to replicate, but one for me to attempt to clearly share in the hope you find some value in relation to your life.

Use of Creativity

My use of creativity is focused on my originality of mind as I show you, the reader, how the meanings of my living values and standards emerged though my practice. These values can be used as critical judgment's in helping to move forward both my practice and my understanding.

It is in this process that I discovered my heart-felt beliefs and realizing their significance attempted to manifest them through my practice. At that particular moment, those specific realizations and actions were at the "intercies of the no longer and the not yet" (Lather, 1994, p. 44). The process and identification of my values and the immediate impact that held for my teaching happened in the past. Lather suggests this has possible implications for the future, but I contend it has quite a direct impact on my current practice and understanding. This thesis captures a moment in time that I have moved through on my way to a new level of knowledge and I am continually using those new understandings to improve my practice.

Living My Values

Along with Lather's rhizomatic and ironic validity, I would like to add the criteria of authenticity and truth. In an article concerning teacher research ethics, Patricia Johnson (1992) suggests

> I became aware of the necessary interpretive quality of data analysis. This act of interpretation is, I learned, profoundly biased. . . . Hence, teacher-researchers who act as both participant and observers in their own classrooms cannot assume either that they work from positions of neutrality, or that the activity of research is neutral (38).

My position concerning my study presented here is that it is not neutral, but it is told through my eyes and reflections as authentically as possible. Using my notes, journals, audio taped conversations and interviews, and the writings of the participants, I attempt to bring the scene to life so you may join in the experience. O'Dea (1994) encourages the researcher to not "skirt the issue of truth", but situate the study "within the confines of 'authenticity' connecting them thereby to that notion of truthfulness and honesty that authenticity entails" (p. 169). It is my purpose to share this study with you in an honest and truthful manner, knowing that my experiences are filtered through my eyes. My vision, however, has been tempered,

sharpened, and enlarged by verbal and written responses from my research colleagues and from members of the communities presented here.

Final Issues

There are two final aspects to this thesis I would like to share with you. The first is audience. A recognition of audience is an essential component to the construction of this thesis. In my undergraduate work, I frequently read research studies where I felt negated as a person. The remote, third person type of writing alienated me from thoroughly interacting with the text and the author. Remembering these uncomfortable past experiences, I sought to live out my values of caring, respect, and compassion by attempting to create a direct relationship with you, the reader, in order to make you a part of my experiences. These values guided the formation of my writing.

The second aspect, and final part to this chapter, is the growth and relationship of the Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices SIG and my development as an educator as it is recounted in this study. As a member and current Chair, I find the organization and I have grown in similar ways and in similar directions. Ken Zeichner, in his 1998 Vice Presidential address highlighted S-Step as an example of the new scholarship in education, and I believe this thesis is an example of that type of scholarship of inquiry.

Audience

An awareness of audience is woven into all parts of this thesis not only as means to effectively reach a particular group of people (Richardson, 200), but as an attempt to live out my value of creating relationships. When I write, I visualize a person who is the audience and write directly to that person by constructing mental conversations. In the beginning, this teacher reclined on the couch on the other side of my computer, recounting the events of the day and gathering energy for tomorrow. I wrote for her-the practicing public school teacher dealing with time constraints, draining energy levels, and the constant everyday pressures of teaching. Later in the writing of my thesis, she took on an additional job as a teacher educator in a local university. Through this new role, she broadened my perspective concerning the topic of audience, and as a result I attempted to write to both teacher educators and practicing teachers.

I wanted my imaginary teacher/teacher educator to read this work, and so I worked to eliminate as many potential barriers as I could. I attempted to write in a way that was clear, informative, mentally stimulating, free of overuse of academic jargon, and even somewhat entertaining. Yet, in the back of mind, I also knew I would be submitting the thesis to be judged. This created continual tension as I worked to construct the thesis to satisfy both audiences.

Professionally there's been much discussion about issues that divide those two audiences. Ken Zeichner (1995) examines the division between teacher research and academic research and notes the difficulty in dialoguing across the two speech communities. As I discussed before, Donmoyer (1996) is concerned about the isolation between groups of professional educators and about the lack of cross communication. In a proposal for a new discipline of education, Lomax and Whitehead (1998) also address the issue of marginalization and calls for active dialogue within members of the education profession. In demonstrating my creativity, I endeavor to use inviting language, model community within the text, and live my values through the construction of this thesis, and I believe my work, as presented in this thesis, offers one way in which the boundaries and constraints as noted by Zeichner, Donmoyer, Lomax and Whitehead can be crossed.

Self-Study of Teacher Educational Practices

In his 1998 vice-presidential address to AERA, Ken Zeichner (1999) reviews 21 years of teacher education research as he characterizes elements of a new scholarship within teacher education:

> Another significant development in the new scholarship of teacher education is that more and more of the research about teacher education is being conducted by those who actually do the work of teacher education. The birth of the self-study in teacher education movement around 1990 has been probably the single most significant development ever in the field of teacher education research. (8)

As a member and now chair of S-Step, I've had the wonderful experience of being a member of this group as we have grown and enriched our understanding about ourselves as teacher educators and our profession. Along with the usual SIG activities at AERA, S-Step has sponsored three international self-study conferences

since 1996. Held in Herstmonceux Castle in East Sussex, England, the each conference attracts approximately 85 participants from around the world. In this section, I identify an inclusive theme for each conference to illustrate the growth and development of S-Step. I would also like to show you, the reader, my parallel development as I present this thesis as an example of the new scholarship.

Vision of the Possible

One of the major results of the first S-Step conference was the publication of *Reconceptualizing Teaching Practice: Self-Study in Teacher Education.* Edited by the SIG's chair, Mary Lynn Hamilton, the book contains a variety of the papers shared during the four days at Herstmonceux. In the Preface, Mary Lynn and Stefinee Pinnegar wrote, "The chapters included in this text illustrate the scope of our work from philosophy to methodology, from examples to processes and practices in self-study. As you read our work, we hope you will gain an understanding of the promise of self-study" (1998). I believe promise really characterizes our place of development as demonstrated at that first conference.

Through our interactions and sharing of ideas, we were gaining a glimpse of the possible concerning self-study. As a novice organization, we struggled over definitions, discovered ways and language to share our ideas, and confirmed the belief of learning from experience. In their paper, Navigating Through a Maze of Contraindications, Guilfoyle, Hamilton, Pinnegar, and Placier (1996) discussed tensions, politics, institutional culture, and narratives of experience as elements of their self-study. This was typical of the range of topics shared over the four days. That first conference provided all of us with an opportunity to try out our thoughts in the company of our self-study colleagues. Douglas Barnes (1998), in the role of conference synthesizer, agreed when he noted that the range of papers presented was "extraordinarily wide" which he attributed to the youth of the organization (x) and additionally, Tom Russell (1998) observed that self-study was so new there were no experts to point the way. We were learning about self-study together.

I think back to the beginnings of my research. I, too, was catching fleeting glances of visions of the possible. The three stories I share with you in chapter 3, are my first glimpses. I recognize the professional and personal potential each incident represents, but I struggle with fully verbalizing the actual potential and formulating a way to fully understand it. I knew something valuable was there, but the full comprehension was tantalizingly just out of reach.

In many ways, my initial attempts at this research was like the play my fellow teacher researchers and I presented at the first Castle Conference. In *Gretel and Hansel, Research in the Woods* , Gretel wanders through the forest and through chance encounters with other fairy tale characters discovers not only the importance of being teacher researcher, but ways in which to become a self reflective researcher. My wandering was more self directed than Gretal's, but I did "happen" upon influential thinkers that affected my direction (These are fully discussed in Chapter 2). Through my readings and my learning to "see" the classroom, I was finding my way through my personal woods to become a researcher of my practices.

Looking Inward

Conversation in Community, the theme of the second S-Step Castle Conference, I believe aptly describes the actions and intentions of the participants. In 1998, we gathered together for a second time filled with questions. In the opening session, Mary Lynn Hamilton, Vicki LaBoskey, John Loughran, and Tom Russell (1998) asked "Have Five Years of Self-Study Changed Teacher Education? Artifacts of Our Personal Development as Teacher Educators". As they examined their growth as teacher educators, they also shared their growing awareness of their values and their roles. John pointed out that "the principles of practice that I am beginning to articulate and better understand in my own practice of teaching about teaching are evidence of my learning through self-study (1). Tom, Mary Lynn, and Vicki echoed this idea as they shared their "artifacts". Vicki summed up the discussion with "It (self-study) has encouraged me to articulate, examine, and on occasion, re-define the fundamental principles that guide my teaching" (4).

Throughout the four days, the question "What is the evidence?" was frequently posed. At the last session, we filled page after page of chart paper with questions, but we always returned to the basic questions of how do we show evidence of individual change and change in teacher education? What were our principles of practice to create those changes? As an organization, I believe we were, at the second conference, using that question to look inward in order to identify and articulate our values and beliefs.

In the same manner, I was looking at my practice, which included my actions, my words, and my attitudes, in order to articulate my beliefs. Jack Whitehead's (1993) idea of "I" as a living contradiction entered my life at this stage and I began to see the need to connect my beliefs and my actions in a unified way. As I share my

work with you, you will be able to see how questions were the beginning points for me to think about past practices, appraise the ideas of others, consider my values, and then arrive at a new understanding. This thesis is the written account of my evidence.

Taking a Place

In the third and most recent conference, I see three major concepts each blending into the other. The first is identity. The conference theme, Exploring Myths and Legends of Teacher Education, suggests a confidence that I don't believe was present in the other two gatherings. As an organization, we were willing to take a clear and close look at our practices and beliefs. For me, this readiness to self examine implies a fairly stable sense of identity and level of maturity not seen in the other two conferences.

The second concept is maturity. At the final Castle session, Gaalen Erickson, one of four conference synthesizers, refers to S-Step as a mature organization which illustrates a clear example of a community of practice, while only four years earlier, Doug Barnes, identified as a young organization which included a very wide range of approaches to self-study. Within a short period of time, S-Step grew into a community with a shared vision and accepted practices.

With this maturity level, I believe, comes responsibility, which is the third concept of this conference. Susan Wilcox, another synthesizer, poses the question "if that's what you know, where does it take you?" In a similar vein, the 2001 AERA conference theme is What we know and how we know it. In the first two S-Step Castle conference's, we struggled with what exactly did we know and how do we know that we know it. And while those ideas are always present when we gather, I believe Wilcox's question takes us beyond the "how" and "what" of research. She pointedly asks us to consider where our self-studies take us individually and as a research community.

In the final conference discussion, both Gaalen Erickson and John Loughran respond to Wilcox's question and point out S-Step's responsibility to "speak to the outside" (Erickson, 2000) "in a scholarly manner" (Loughran, 2000). Supported by Zeichner's public declaration of the significance of S-Step with the field of teacher education, then S-Step does have the responsibility to share more of our work and become more visible and influential with the education profession.

How do I see my work in relation to the concepts of identity, maturity, and responsibility? I believe my identity emerged as I worked through the process of

identifying and defining my values and attempting to live my values through the construction of this text. I learned to articulate who I am as I worked to present an alternative form of criticism based on those identified values. And like S-Step, I grew from this knowledge. I believe my work illustrates how one educator came to create her own knowledge through the process of self-study and as a consequence is a strong example of the new scholarship associated with self-study.

When I consider Wilcox's question of "if this is what I know, where does it take me?" along with the AERA Program Committee (2000) assertions that educators need to clearly express what has been learned from research, and that learnings can inform others within the educational profession, I arrive at the following:

I know how to use self reflection to continually check my beliefs and my actions and it takes me to a new level of refined ability in gaining self understanding.

I know how to create and sustain communities and that knowledge enabled me to help create Chinook Charter School, the first elementary charter school in Alaska.

I know how to use the ideas of others, my reflections, and observations to create my individual knowledge and it allows me to show my new learning in relationship to the ideas of others (described in Chapter 9).

I know a way to respond to the ideas of fellow educators in ways that enable me to fully live my values and it allows me to offer an alternative to traditional criticism.

Taken as a whole, I realize I'm providing an example of a self-study which responds to S-Step's call for a public scholarly voice. In addition, this thesis also is a reply to AERA's invitation to clearly demonstrate knowledge and to show valid ways of reaching that understanding. I'm offering one way a teacher educator can show and make clear personal standards of judgment for the purpose of validating claims to knowledge. I also know the knowledge gained through this study takes me to a clearer level of understanding of myself as an teacher and person and as a consequence enables me to become a better educator, but at the same time it takes me to a more humble stance in the awareness of my limitations and abilities.

CHAPTER 2
SEEKING COMMUNITY: A MINDFUL JOURNEY

Note to the Reader

I begin this chapter with two personal touches. The first is this message to you. The second is a glimpse into my personal life as I talk about my love of Alaska and of teaching. Both are an attempt to encourage the beginnings of a community between the two of us.

Next, I demonstrate the need for community and how, on various levels, agencies and individuals are working to establish communities. I move into the specific realm of education and review the thoughts of those who argue for the need to develop classroom communities. Building on these ideas, I offer my four original elements that define a community.

The major section of this chapter is a blending of the account of my trip to Alaska and a review of the bodies of literature that helped in the formation of my ideas concerning community. Along with helping to expand my understanding of community, I show how each educator's views lead me to a reconsideration of my actions and into constructing a new role for myself as an educator.

Through examining cooperative learning, I identify specific elements within community that trouble me. Seeking answers to my concerns, I examine the areas of group dynamics along with verbal and nonverbal social interaction patterns. I show how I build upon these cultural linguistic principles to gain a more comprehensive awareness concerning the actions of my students, thus bringing me closer to an understanding of how to construct and facilitate a positive classroom community.

In the final section of this chapter, I explore elements of teacher research and action research that enable me to define myself as a combination of both.

Dear Reader, Alaska Teacher Research Network Members, and Bath Fellows,

It's nine o'clock in the morning, the sun is glowing low in the sky, mist is clinging to the tips of the trees, the birches occasionally cast off a lingering leaf, and the squirrels are still asleep. Alaska is a glorious place to live. The scenery, the weather, and the opportunities offer challenges to the eye, the heart, and the spirit. I wouldn't want to live anywhere else. Alaska has given me strength, courage, and an undaunting vision of the possible. This thesis is about strength, courage, and a vision of the possible. It is an adventure story about professional and personal challenges, and I'm inviting you to join me.

Throughout this thesis, I share stories both professional and personal. I've deliberately chosen to share my learning in such a way that invites all of you into my world. It's my hope that this thesis will be a living experience where educators like yourself find the ideas useful. Many of you I know from long professional interactions and personal friendships; some of us haven't met yet. For those who are new friends, I welcome you as part of my community. I hope you feel at home as we meet through the ideas and text of this thesis.

Reviewing of Literature

I have two passions in my life: Alaska and teaching. In chronological order, Alaska came first, then my teaching career. In significance, they are both equal. The more I learn, the more I realize the Alaskan influence on my life, and the longer I live here, the more I understand the interrelationship of nature and the influence that it has on my teaching and learning.

There is an indefinable spirit about living in the northernmost part of the United States. In one sense, it's a gift, a package tied with iridescent ribbons of the aurora in the winter and unwrapped each day as the sun moves across the sky in the summer. I have an incredible feeling of thankfulness to be allowed to live in a place filled with so much open space and immeasurable beauty. In another way, it's a formidable challenge, even with modern conveniences, to live in such extremes. But even the problems of darkness, cold, mosquitoes, and high prices become peaks to climb, obstacles to conquer, and summits to plant my flag. Alaska has taught me to be resourceful, creative, and independent. Alaska has given me a spirit of adventure and a wonder of life. There's an energy and the feeling that everything is possible that I've found nowhere else. It's the "freshness, the freedom, the farness" themes that echo through Robert Service's poetry that I find compelling and alluring.

My other passion is my teaching and learning. I've discovered that I can't do one without the other. By teaching and reflecting on my actions, I confront inconsistencies between my actions and my beliefs. It is through consistent examination of myself as a professional educator that I learn how to improve my practice and myself. By continuing to study and reflect on the knowledge of others, I test my assumptions and actions. As I read, listen, or discuss ideas, I am forced to look beyond my personal vision. As I enter my nineteenth year of public school teaching, the acts of teaching and learning blend, support, reinforce, and extend each other.

The Call for Community

The growth of fast-food restaurants, personal daily calendars, and the numerous books about time management appear to reflect our concern about fitting in more in less space. With the invention of nontip coffee cups, cellular car phones, and drive-through banks and espresso shops, many of us conduct our lives while traveling from place to place. And as the empty carpool lanes on the freeways indicate, other than dependent family members, most of us tend to travel alone. Shaffer and Anundsen (1993) point out, "neither women nor men feel they have much time to maintain the ties of mutual support. It is commonplace for families as well as singles to have little or no contact with others who live only a door or two away" (p. 4). Amy Wu (1996) supports this view in an article entitled "Stop the Clock". As she examines her life as a college student and family member and recounts her experiences of microwave cooking rather than baking, e-mail correspondence instead of writing letters, and tape-recorded books in place of reading, she illustrates that demands on our time make personal interactions short and hurried. She concludes that "we're living life on fast-forward without a pause button" (p. 14).

Yet there are a number of individuals and organizations that are consciously working to create spaces for personal interactions. Like Sherlock Holmes beginning a new case, M. Scott Peck (1993) claims, "there is something afoot. Social scientists might label it ëthe community movement'" (p. vii). The idea of seeking community seems to be growing within established institutions; across continents and within nations; inside cities, towns, and neighborhoods; and among small interest groups. For example, a number of countries are exploring ways to form stronger connections. Some of the connections are based on economic reasons, such as the European

multicountry economic community, and some are a result of a nationalistic view of unity, such as Canadians voting to retain the whole of Quebec.

Within the United States, groups are also seeking to build communities. Some, like the Walt Disney Company, are using physical means in designing new community housing areas based on common green areas, porches, and wide walking areas. ("Disney Begins Work", 1995). Other towns, such as Greenwood, South Carolina, use existing institutions to collaborate on local concerns. Schools, businesses, government, and religious groups join together to solve commonly identified concerns (Senge, Roberts, Ross, Smith, & Kleiner, 1994).

In the economic sector, some businesses and corporations are moving from the concept of a more individualistic competitive type of worker with a single-minded goal to a more collective effort to solve complex problems (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993). The business sections of bookstores, offering such titles as Team Talk (Donnillon, 1996), Team Coach (Deeprose, 1995), and Teams At the Top (Katzenbach, 1998), attest to this growing movement. There are even companies created for the purpose of encouraging businesses to collaborate and form cohesive communities, such as the Center for Organizational Learning, the Institute for Healthcare Improvement, Innovation Associates, and Interactive Learning Systems (Senge, et al., 1994).

Here in Fairbanks, William Wood, a highly respected town elder, continually works to pull all of us together with his frequent newspaper articles reminding us of our responsibilities and obligations as residents of Fairbanks. Finally, within my charter school, our entire staff of five frequently plan trips and outings together for the single purpose of strengthening our personal and professional community with each other.

Within my school district and beyond my school, other educators are finding ways to be members of a community. Six schools replicated the professional development class I describe in Chapter 5 for the purpose of learning together. Two years ago, Bonnie Gaborik, a fellow ATRN member, established focused study groups on a district-wide level. These small groups of educators met together four to five times during the year to share their learning about a common topic. Nationally and internationally, the growth of special interest groups (SIGS) in the American Educational Research Association (AERA), the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) and the International Reading Association (IRA) indicate the desire of educators to meet and come to know like minded colleagues.

On a personal level, I, too, seek connections: connections with others and connections with myself. This study is an examination of my attempts to make those connections with my students, the parents of those students, fellow teachers, other teacher researchers, and myself.

However, I also realize that the idea of community is not universally accepted or practiced. I am well aware that generally our society values competition, and our schools strive to produce individuals who are prepared to compete. I am also aware of the current emphasis on national, state and local standards for students as well as for teachers which focuses on individual attainment in comparison with others.

Yet educators such as Noddings (1995), Elbaz (1992), and Bosworth (1995) are calling for caring educational communities created by teachers and students. These three researchers stress the importance of inclusion, relationships, and personal life connections within the school setting. In a recent article entitled "Making Connections Through Holistic Learning", J. Miller (1999) supports this view by arguing for a "broader vision of education that fosters the development of whole human beings" (p. 48).

I believe my work as shared in this thesis provides examples of ways in which these caring communities can be facilitated. As this work demonstrates, I've attempted to expand the idea of supporting, caring communities to go past my classroom door and into other areas of my professional life.

Definition of Community

In *Arctic Dreams,* Barry Lopez (1986) attempts to describe the Arctic landscape:

> The physical landscape is baffling in its ability to transcend whatever we would make of it. It is as subtle in its expression as turns of the mind, and larger than our grasp and yet it is still knowable. The mind, full of curiosity and analysis, disassembles a landscape and then reassembles the pieces—the nod of a flower, the color of the night sky, the murmur of an animal—trying to fathom its geography. (p. xxi)

Like Lopez trying to understand the vastness of the Arctic tundra by noting the individual elements and his relationship with each, I believe that defining community requires a similar approach. Following Barry Lopez's efforts at deconstruction and

reconstruction, I wish to define communities by looking at them in four different ways: externally, magnified, internally, and reflectively.

The external view of community provides the broad view. It's generally agreed that a community is a group of people who are working together to achieve a goal or who share a common experience (Johnson & Johnson, 1982; Pierce & Gilles, 1993). Using the external approach to community, my class of twenty-four students could be viewed as a community because we share the same room. In a similar fashion, the parents of these students could be seen as a community, using their parent status with my students as the uniting factor. The same broad principle could be applied to the other communities in my study: the teachers in my building and teacher research colleagues in my state and beyond. And while I do agree with this general view, I believe there are more details to observe than this wide look allows. It's my belief that each person and the spatial relationship of these members create another facet of community.

The magnified view allows me to examine the community on this level. Through closer inspection, the interactive relationship between the community members—the dynamic living aspect that occurs within a community—comes into focus. Palmer (1993) describes this as "a network of relationships between individual persons" (p. 122). I first realized this new aspect of community when my students and I participated in an all-day dance workshop. In the story The Dancers, shared in Chapter 3, I saw the classroom community grow in new ways as students identified not only their individual role within the performance, but their awareness and need of others to make the final dance successful. As a group, we moved into a new level of growth.

Covey (1994) suggests that as people work together, learn from each other, and help each other grow, they form a common ground of understanding. Covey's suggestion is a good one, but I've discovered that for the community to establish that common ground of understanding, they need more than the opportunity to work together. They need the opportunity to reflect on the event and their roles. In Chapter 3, I recount a story of my sixth graders involved in an all-day dance experience, and while the dance became our common ground, our relationships deepened and the community took on a new dimension of its own because of our spontaneous discussion afterwards. With the communities described in this thesis, I've attempted to create similar magical experiences, followed by reflection and discussions to foster more in-depth relationships and to nudge the community to develop its own identity.

Some attempts are more successful than others. But in each case, my purpose is for the members of the community to gain a sense of value by contributing to and creating a new organism that can become larger than its individual members (Peck, 1987; Schrage, 1990). But as I've discovered in my work with various communities, to only focus on the community in this way is to miss another essential element.

The internal view of community focuses on the change that happens to the individuals as they work toward a mutual goal within a supportive environment. For me, it is felt as much as it is seen. Over the years of facilitating communities within my classroom, I'll suddenly notice students like Mark confidently sharing his writing with a visitor or Allysa asking probing questions during math. I've watched as students grow in confidence as they settle into a supportive and accepting community of peers. I totally agree with Shaffer's and Anundsen's point that "you cannot separate community from building individuals" (1993, p. 119). Once I understood this benefit of community, I purposely worked to develop and support this feature. This aspect of community has been my personal goal within each community, but especially with ATRN. I wanted my fellow teacher researchers to see that "belonging to a group means being needed, as well as needful and believing you have something vital to contribute" (Charney, 1992, p. 14).

The final way of looking at community is reflectively. In my work with communities, I've watched as members learn to trust each other and gain in self-confidence. Along with this growth in self-confidence, I've observed the community become an accepting environment for personal reflection. Through open and honest public discussions and personal reflective writings, I've seen students and adults honestly examine their motives and actions. As members examine their own relationships and roles with each other, the community becomes a place where members have the freedom and support to turn inward to examine their own values of who they are and what they can do (Peterson, 1992).

Like my students and other community members, I, too, examine myself. A part of my work presented here is the holding of a hand lens on myself. Through the process of facilitating and being a participant in all four of the communities, I've learned a great deal about myself. I view myself as a "living contradiction" (Whitehead, 1993) as I continually examine and re-examine myself against my identified values and my daily actions.

Using the external, magnified, internal, and inner reflective views, I define community as a living, changing organism that obtains its life, direction, and

personality from equally living and changing individuals, each with distinct characteristics. As the individuals come together for a purpose and through the process of interacting, the individuals come to see the importance of the community as well as the significance of their being within the community. It is through this recognition of their role that individuals learn about themselves. This reflection then influences the life and personality of the community. A community is ever changing as the people within it change.

In describing community, Peck (1993) reflects, "there remains something about it that is inherently mysterious, miraculous, unfathomable" (p. 60). I agree. A vital community is complex in structure and elusive in description, similar to Lopez's view of the arctic landscape. But by combining the external, the magnification, the internal, and the inner reflective view, I believe I have a full multidimensional picture of community.

The Alaskan Trip, Part 1

Every Alaskan has a unique tale to tell about what brought them here, how they got here, and the adventures along the way. Twenty-seven years ago, my husband and I, along with our two young sons and a cat, left Ohio to begin our northern adventure. The normal traveler can drive the distance in about fourteen days. But due to many mechanical problems with our renovated school bus, it took us three months to travel from Ohio to Fairbanks. Robert Service (1919) writes in "The Law of the Yukon," "Send me men girt for the combat, men who are grit to the core" (p. 24). Webster's College Dictionary (Costello, 1991) defines grit as a firmness of character, indomitable spirit, pluck. My husband and I learned grit. Not easily and not willingly, but we learned. This trip was and continues to be a pivotal event in my life and serves as a significant reference point in all that I do.

Like my Alaskan trip, this thesis reflects my long journey in exploring the factors of community. It was not a two-week, ten-hour-a-day-drive, but a long consistent expedition with many reflective stops and unexpected turns along the way. Not only did I learn about how to most effectively foster community, but, like on the trip to Alaska, I learned grit—not easily and willingly, but I learned.

I didn't travel alone in my journey to understand and explore the issues of community. Others influenced me along the way. In some instances, I stumbled upon critical people while I was in the middle of struggling with an idea, and their ideas led me to a clearer and sharper understanding. In other cases, I discovered significant

ideas long after I developed my own working theory. The following is an account of my relationship with those critical people and ideas. Even though I often delved into many diverse works at similar times, I've organized this section into the three main areas of group process, linguistic theory, and teacher research to make it more coherent for you, the reader. It is my hope that as you travel with me, you will gain a deeper understanding of my study as it is held in relationship to the work of others.

Group Process

In looking back at our trip to Alaska, it's obvious that Ken and I should have been better prepared. We should have carefully examined every aspect of the bus. We should have sought out some sort of training on engine mechanics, and at the very least, we should have purchased a book about the care and repair of bus engines. But we didn't; we just began. Which is exactly how I entered into the study of group process with my students. I began. After watching the disasters in my first attempts at writing response groups, which I share in Chapter 3, I knew had to make some changes.

As I recount in Chapter 3, I began watching the groups of students who somehow easily worked together and completed the assigned task. I wanted to understand how they did it. According to Johnson and Johnson (1982), "group dynamics is the area of social psychology that focuses on advancing our knowledge about the nature of group life" (p. 7). This was exactly what I wanted to know, so unknowingly I began with this broad general look at group dynamics within my writing groups in my classroom in the hope of increasing my understanding, and in turn, enabling me to help all my students.

I must admit I didn't begin my study with an extensive search into the field of group dynamics. After a year or two of my own study of group process within my classroom, I discovered David and Roger Johnson. At this point, I felt I needed current, accessible, and concrete information, and for me that was the work of David and Roger Johnson and their associates.

The Johnsons' extensive theoretical studies and specific actions on classroom cooperative learning provided me with a beginning verbal framework for my research. They contend (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1986) that students can be successful working with others when positive interdependence, face-to-face interactions, individual accountability, interpersonal and small group skills, and group

processing are in place. I began looking at the groups within my classrooms using these five elements in varying degrees.

Positive interdependence requires students to recognize that all must work together to achieve the specific goal. The story of The Dance in Chapter 3 tells of my first awareness of this understanding. While David and Roger Johnson believe this cooperative factor should be integrated into the content of the teaching, I found it more effective to emphasize it during major projects, such as earning money for a camping trip or painting the gym. I labeled these activities Magic Moments, and I talk more about them in the following chapters.

The next cooperative strategy is face-to-face interaction. Before I read Johnson and Johnson, I realized a major problem with my writing response group stemmed from the fact that the students couldn't talk effectively with each other. Johnson, Johnson, and Holubec's (1986) work stressed the importance of providing more interaction opportunities between the students. I built upon their idea of processing where "some time should be spent talking about how well the groups functioned today, what things were done well, and what things could be improved" (p. 52). This required me to arrange the room in such a way to encourage talk and to examine the teaching day to provide opportunities and time for discussion. It also forced me to examine my role as a teacher. I began to see myself as a creator of opportunities, listener, and community member rather than a master conductor. Part of my study recounted here illustrates my attempts at changing my role.

Individual accountability is another essential element, and its purpose is to "ensure that each group member learn the assigned material" (p. 8). They suggest such strategies as "practice tests, randomly selecting members to explain answers, having members edit each other's work, and randomly picking one paper from the group to grade" (p. 45). Others in the cooperative learning community, such as Slavin (1983) and Kagan (1992) also suggest varying aspects of accountability, ranging from group rewards to group competitions. I chose not to stress the idea of individual accountability, since I was more interested in creating a more holistic community where personal learning was a natural expectation than focusing exclusively on the academics.

The Johnsons provided me with the most help through their work on interpersonal and small-group skills. They believe that specific social skills need to be taught so that each child can be successful in working with others. Through such strategies described in Chapter 3, I learned how to make collaboration visible and

verbal to myself and to the students. I also describe in that same chapter a way I built upon this idea to enable my students, parents, and myself to come together to create a set of common values for learners.

The final cooperative element of David and Roger Johnson's list is the processing procedure. It involves the whole class taking time after a collaborative activity to reflect upon the social aspects of what has just taken place. As I note in the story "The Dance", I stumbled upon this idea on my own, but after reading Johnsons' work, I began to incorporate it more fully with many different activities. The idea of focused processing led me to create "Reflective Friday", an entire day devoted to reflecting on the week's learning. This continues to be valued by the students as the most important day of the week.

Johnson and Johnson's work led me to Elizabeth Cohen's (1994) ideas on cooperative group work. She too uses positive interdependence, face-to-face interactions, individual accountability, group process, and interpersonal and small group skills to structure cooperative learning within the classroom. But she differs from Johnson and Johnson by using these ideas to emphasize the development of a democratic classroom. She contends:

> Probably the most important norm to teach when training students to discuss, to make decisions, and to do creative problem solving is the norm for equal participation. When student feel that everyone ought to have a say and receive a careful hearing, the problems of inequality and dominance . . . can, in part be solved. (p. 53)

My awareness of Cohen's work arrived at a time when I was proposing that all my students—bilingual, gifted and talented, and resource—remain in my room throughout the day. This approach, called inclusion (Ferguson, 1995), is now embraced by the school district, but at that time my suggestion was considered quite radical. I argued that because of my collaborative approach, all students could learn through active participation with the positive support of their peers. The lessons learned in my classroom carried over into my work with parents, colleagues, and ATRN as I became very aware of equal speech and thinking opportunities.

The more I worked with my ideas alongside those of David and Roger Johnson and Elizabeth Cohen, the more I realized there were other elements that could add a richness and depth to my understanding of group dynamics, which in turn

would enhance my contributions to each of the communities. There were some things I knew for certain. I knew I didn't want to change the curriculum so the students could use cooperative learning, as Slavin, Madden and Stevens (1990) suggest in their curriculum-specific approach, nor did I wish to rely on a set list of strategies as advocated by Kagan and Kagan (1993).

At this time I was attempting to create a more integrated learning day with my students. I was working toward seamless learning, where curriculum areas were not segregated into specific time slots but were blended and woven into a larger unit of study. For this same reason, I didn't want to single out the idea of cooperative learning. I didn't want the students to see it as something we did from 9:30 to 10:00 on Wednesdays. My goal was to strengthen group dynamics as naturally as possible as the need and opportunity arose in the course of the day.

I also knew I wanted to move beyond the work of Roger and David Johnson to somehow emphasize the importance of the individual and at the same time help the students see the advantage of being a member of a supportive community. My students didn't have much experience being a member of a community. As military children, they frequently moved and generally had great individual survival skills. I wanted to offer them another view of what school and learning could be like. In my dreams for them as they moved to another state or progressed into a middle school, I envisioned them creating their own supportive communities based on the experiences we had together in sixth grade.

I re-examined Cohen's work to study the importance of equity. This led me to the idea of consideration of the other. The idea of caring and being aware of the other was a strikingly new dimension of group dynamics to me. I read the works of Noddings (1984, 1995), Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986), Bateson (1990, 1994), and Palmer (1993). These authors offered me two perspectives on the topic of caring. The first was the importance of demonstrating concern and consideration for the other. The second significant finding for me was the strength I gained from reading these accounts. I finished them with a feeling of confidence regarding my relationships with my students and the members of the other communities. I returned to my favorite teacher research studies, looking for this quiet, supportive quality of care. I next examined my work with my students. I realized I had been unconsciously modeling this type of behavior, but as with my other work with group dynamics, I needed to make this idea visible so students could gain entrance into this way of thinking.

Unlike Noddings' (1995) proposal of making the concept of caring a specific field of instruction within the school day and similar to my view of cooperative learning, I wanted to integrate the idea into our daily classroom life. As appropriate occasions arose, I began telling students repeatedly that one of the ways that we are different from other classes is that we care for and help each other. During class meetings, we made quick verbal lists of how we show that care and help. We also acknowledged achievements in each others' lives, such as the winning of merit badges in Boy and Girl Scouts, participating in sports events, and playing or singing in musical concerts. While these occurrences were individual and for the most part happened outside the regular school day, I attempted to build group caring by making them a public celebration during class meetings or during casual conversations at lunch time.

With encouragement from my discoveries, I bravely traveled on.

The Trip, Part 2

After spending eight weeks waiting for parts for our school bus at International Falls, Minnesota, crossing the Canadian boarder was a monumental occasion. "Home free," I thought. Around three o'clock in the afternoon, the bus gave a huge sigh, a sharp clanging noise pierced the air, and all the gauges whirled—again. We coasted into a small grocery store and stopped. While we waited for the part, we noticed that the store owners were clearing the land behind the store. We pitched in. Ken chopped, I hauled the trees to the property edge, and the boys picked up the brush. During the evenings, we sat on their front porch and listened to their plans to build a home on the land behind the store.

Interaction Patterns

The Canadian store owners needed to clear the land to obtain a clearer picture of where to build their house. The clearing of brush allowed them to see the dips and rises, the moist and dry areas, and the sunlight patterns. I, too, realized I needed additional perspectives on my classroom observations and questions, so I sought out the expertise of others.

Since conversation and talk was the most observable factor in group work, I began with sociolinguistics. According to Hayakawa, (1990), Wardhaugh (1988), and others, sociolinguistics involves not only the knowledge of word choice, word order, and work emphasis, but also the ability to know how to structure these elements to

send the desired message. As well as knowing the structure, the speaker needs to send the message in such a way that the receiver understands the speaker's intent. This sending and receiving can vary from culture to culture and from situation to situation. According to Goffman (1972):

> In any society, whenever the physical possibility of spoken interaction arises, it seems that a system of practices, conventions, and procedural rules come into play which functions as a means of guiding and organizing the flow of messages. (p. 33)

Examination of the interaction rules shows that they are intricately built upon subtle understandings of the speaker and the receiver. Without comprehension between the sender and the receiver, misunderstandings will occur, and misunderstandings were occurring on a daily basis in my classroom. Goffman's six face-to-face interactions helped me to understand the behaviors and verbal exchanges in my sixth-grade community.

The first of Goffman's face-to-face interactions is line. Line is a verbal or nonverbal act in which a person expresses his feelings or his views of a situation. Johnson and Johnson (1987) identify this action as openness. Within in my classroom, I noticed that most students were able to maintain their line in a variety of different situations, while a few students couldn't maintain it at all.

The second interaction pattern is that of face. Like line, face is an image that can be affected by others. I was seeing students ignoring or disregarding the words and actions of their peers. This kind of action happened frequently when students worked together. It was like the group imposed a sanction against another student and effectively shut the unwanted student into silence. This bit of new knowledge gave me a significant insight to the inner workings of the student groups.

Goffman's third interaction pattern is the maintaining of face. In cooperative learning, this is referred to as acceptance within the group. One of the things I learned from this principle was the importance of encouragement. Eleven-and-twelve-year-olds are not known for easily dispensing praise, so I intentionally modeled encouragement and devised other strategies to help students practice ways to encourage each other. This process is explained further in Chapter 3.

A fourth principle is to be out of face or in the wrong face. This can cause confusion, embarrassment, and shame and prevent further interaction with the peer

group. Here, my goal with the students was to lessen the struggle to regain face once it was lost by softening the barriers constructed by the others.

If the group offers support and assurance, that is giving face, Goffman's fifth principle. This is often referred to as support. I noticed that support and assurance were being offered to a select few and not to everyone. The popular students were given more encouragement than the ones on the edge of the social structure. Again, this new piece of information helped me understand the inner workings of the community, but it posed additional problems as I became more acutely aware of the children on the fringe of the community. I had to find a way to make the community more inclusive and open.

The last of Goffman's interaction patterns is consideration. This is the willingness of students to aid in the saving of face and feelings of their peers. This is done because of the caring and commitment among the members. I knew I had to do much work in this area since this doesn't come easily for eleven-, twelve- and thirteen-year-old students.

Goffman's work provided me with a guiding system that enabled me to organize the happenings within the whole community as well as smaller work groups. These six interaction patterns not only gave me very specific ways to view the communication events in my room but gave me pegs on which to try out some specific actions.

Studying Goffman's work led me to H. Grice's (1975) cooperative principle. While Goffman gave me a broad framework in which to organize my observations, Grice provided me with the specifics and details of conversation. As reviewed by Wardhaugh (1988), Grice defines conversation as a mutually beneficial act based on four maxims of (1) quantity, be informative; (2) quality, speak the truth; (3) relation, be relevant to the topic; and (4) manner, be clear and avoid ambiguity. This is similar to Jakobson's communication theory that Polkinghorne describes in Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences (1988). In Jakobson's view, the communicated message is dependent upon three factors: there can be no communication without the receiver hearing the words of the speaker, the discourse must be organized into a coded pattern, and the context or meaning of the message must be clear. When the speaker and the receiver begin a conversation, they interact presuming these pre-established rules are in place. However neither one is required to follow all the rules, so misunderstanding can occur.

I'd never considered conversation as a cooperative action, but in looking at successful groups within my class, those that were able to work together were the ones that followed these rules. Those that were not successful either inadvertently or purposely avoided Grice's and Jakobson's conversation conventions. Again I was faced with helpful information that added more questions. Late at night, I found myself wondering about honesty, clarity of message, and rules of conversations. How did these elements fit into my already crowded teaching day? Was it my place to deliberately teach personal honesty, and if so, what did that entail? I worried about teaching such topics that were so far from the required curriculum.

With no resolution to these specific concerns, I returned to watch the successful groups. Not only were they following Grice's maxims and using the positive face-to-face interactions as set out by Goffman, but there was something different in the way they physically related to one another. They sat closer, looked at each other and just seemed more at ease. This observation let me to the work of E. T. Hall and R. Birdwhistell.

Hall (1966) points out, "it is essential that we learn to read the silent communications as easily as the printed and spoken ones. Only by doing so can we also reach other people" (p. 6). Hall's silent communications deal with proxemics. Proxemics examines man's use of space in relation to himself. Within what Hall calls informal space, people have specific ways of positioning their bodies in relation to others, and these spatial "rules" are learned along with the verbal rules. The rules include the concepts of territoriality and zones of distance. Territoriality is demonstrated by Zack always wanting to sit in the same spot in the reading corner and becoming upset when someone else is there. I especially noticed territoriality in the work with my building peers. As described in Chapter 5, I attempted to shift their thinking about their personal space by deliberately sitting in a new place each week.

Along with territory, according to Hall, every person has zones of distance. The zones vary from the very intimate zone that includes close physical contact to the public distance zone that is used on public occasions by speakers. People determine their zone of distance by the specific situation. Collier (1983) refers to these zones as a ring of privacy, and each culture has definite rules for distances and what is acceptable in each.

After reading these studies, it occurred to me that since my sixth grade is quite ethnically diverse, it might be easy to misread the specific zones of distance of each of us. I began watching how students casually used space during interactions and noted

the vast difference in rings of privacy. Ellen and David liked to be close enough to physically touch others, while Ben and others preferred a definite cushion of space between their working partners.

This led me to see what would happen if I attempted to break down that invisible zone between the students. I began with our morning singing and story time. With all the students spread out on the floor, I requested that they move very close toward me "so they could see the book." In the beginning, I had to repeatedly prompt them all to move forward, fill up the spaces, and get closer. After a month or so, the closeness became a routine part of our morning opening, and I saw evidence of carry-over into other parts of our day. I tried to model the reduced ring of privacy constantly. Throughout the day, I casually touched students on the arm or shoulder. Students began to relax and easily move close together to work and discuss. There were some students who never fully joined in, but they did reduce their personal distance. I believe this to be one example of my creative use of blending theoretical knowledge and practice.

Just as Hall expresses the importance of learning the silent communication system, Birdwhistell, too, feels strongly about the influence of nonverbal communication (1970):

> A series of movements in any part of my body could have changed the nature of the communication in a manner analogic to the shifts which occur if I change the quality of my voice, the words, or the phonemes in the verbalized material. These are only a few of the communication particles which must be understood if we are to comprehend the complex phenomenon of communication. (p. 18)

Birdwhistell examines kinesics, the movement of individuals within the context of the setting and the situation. He becomes quite exact in determining movement, dividing the body into eight areas and then rating each movement on intensity, duration, and range. Motions such as eye blinks, chin thrusts, shoulder nods, leg and foot shifts, and hand and finger movements can be used as markers to help organize speech patterns, or they can be used without speech. If used without speech, these actions contain messages "read" by others. He notes that, "We move as well as speak American English" (p. 102).

In summarizing Birdwhistell's work, Pease (1993) notes that Birdwhistell "found that the verbal component of a face-to-face conversation is less than thirty-five per cent and that over sixty-five per cent of the communication is done non-verbally" (p. 9). Pease goes on to state that "non-verbal signals carry about five times as much impact as the verbal channel and that, when the two are incongruent, people rely on the non-verbal message; the verbal content may be disregarded" (p. 14).

I was missing a great deal of the classroom communication by only concentrating on the verbal conversations. As Birdwhistell (1970) points out, "these systems (language and body motion) cross reference each other and establish full patterns of conversation performance which operate in the social interactional sequence" (p. 227). I realized I had a great deal of work to do if I wanted to gain a deeper understanding of the complex communication patterns of my students. I continued to observe, try something new, watch the results, and then modify. Through these mini-action research studies, I felt I was coming closer to being able to articulate my thoughts about the events within my classroom. As always, I continued to read and tentatively began to record my thoughts and actions. I felt like I was on my way to uncovering the mysteries of my sixth graders.

The Trip, Part 3

After another repair in Canada, then discovering the bus overheated while climbing the Rocky Mountains, and next replacing a back tire, we finally arrived at Whitehorse, Yukon Territory, Canada. Leery of any new sound of impending disaster, I spent my days analyzing each unusual noise and unexpected jolt. What did it mean? I constantly examined the last of the working gauges and dials. What would happen next? Were we going to burn up or explode? The ultimate question lingered: would we make it to Alaska?

Teacher Research

Questions! They were my daily companions concerning the precarious, slow-moving, ready-to-explode bus. Every sound and quiver filled my head with possible questions. This entire thesis is built upon my research questions of What if?, What would happen if?, and How can I? In my first narrative, I share my initial wonderings of the inability of sixth graders to work together in writing response groups. In the second section, I wonder how I can help build a parent community. The third narrative involves my questions about supporting a professional community within

my school, and in my last story, I wonder how I can help create a broader teacher research organization. Like my seemingly never-ending trip to Alaska, these studies occurred over an extended period of time in my professional life.

My introduction to teacher research arrived at precisely the time when I was filling my professional life with questions. From my work with the National Writing Project, I learned to view the student as a source of information. Donald Graves (1983) and others showed me that my students were capable of providing me with information about their learning if I took the time to ask questions and carefully consider their answers. The transition into teacher research seemed to be a natural one. This is supported by Bissex (1987):

> It's no accident that the notion of teacher-researcher grew out of writing projects that actively engaged teachers in doing what they taught. And whatever our subject matter, isn't it learning that we teach? Just as classrooms become writing workshops, they also become learning workshops, where both teachers and students see themselves as learners, where teachers are learning from children, where teachers ask questions of themselves as well as of students, where teachers are models of learners. (p. 4)

I was seeing my classroom as my laboratory where I could ask myself questions, test my assumptions based on my observations, and then make changes in my teaching. In my experimenting, I was taking educational risks. I was ready for information about teacher research.

I remember sitting on a hard folding chair in a meeting room in Anchorage, wondering if this was what I really wanted to do. Five one-year veteran Alaskan teacher researchers sailed through their mini-research presentations and left me in a bewildered state as I tried to sort out the methods and meanings of data analysis, data collection, framing questions, literature review, and publishing possibilities. During the week, I was introduced to the works of Ann Berthoff (1987), Dixie Goswami and Peter Stillman (1987), and Glenda Bissex and Richard Bullock (1987) and gained a general view of teacher research as a possible structure to support my constant questions, thinking, and actions. Pat D'Arcy, the featured speaker, shared teacher research examples from England. Her perspective helped me to see that other educators were struggling with similar questions and using teacher research as a way

to clarify their thinking. So, armed with many questions, a little knowledge, and a lot of courage, I began life as a teacher researcher.

Definitions

Teacher Researcher

Intrigued with the concept of teacher research, I set out on a personal quest. In my attempt to sort out ways to begin a teacher research study, I also felt the need to create a personal definition of teacher research.

I began by looking for a common definition among published educators and found similarities but not total agreement. There appeared to be a range of definitions, flowing from the general to the specific. Mayher (1990) uses the general term "teacher learners" that focuses on the educator-self through examination of teaching. He defines teacher learners as educators who are "trying to reopen deeply held convictions about learning and teaching" (p. xv). Eleanor Duckworth (1987), however, seems to put equal emphasis on teaching and research when describing the teacher as "both practitioner and a researcher" (p. 134). At the time, these definitions were much too general for me and didn't offer the preciseness I was looking for.

By combining several more views of teacher research, I gained a sharper picture of myself as a teacher researcher. In Reclaiming the Classroom, Goswami and Stillman (1987) view teacher researchers as educators who ask themselves questions, observe, record and draw conclusions. Glenda Bissex (1987) supports this view when she describes a teacher researcher as an observer, questioner, and learner. These views not only offered a more concrete picture of a teacher researcher but also reinforced my idea of process within a teacher research study.

Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Susan Lytle (1993) added another important piece to my thinking by defining teacher research as a "systematic and intentional inquiry carried out by teachers" (p. 7). The words "systematic and "intentional" refined and polished my concept of myself as a teacher researcher. I began to see myself as a teacher researcher who conducts systematic and intentional classroom research for the initial purpose of improving my own practice.

Action Research

Being a teacher researcher led me to Jack Whitehead. As my advisor at the University of Bath, he introduced me to the term "action research". At first, I thought action research was another name for teacher research, but through many

conversations with Jack and other, as well as reading accounts by action researchers, I began to see subtle differences.

Both action research and teacher research claim Kurt Lewin as a founding father. Lewin laid the foundation for a cyclic approach to inquiry with the ever-repeating fact-finding, conceptualization, planning, execution, more fact-finding, and evaluation (Sanford, 1970). Both teacher research and action research use this structure as a basis for inquiry, but each has a different emphasis (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993). Noffke (1994) points out the strong focus that action research gives to social and ethical concerns, while teacher research seems to be more localized within the teaching sphere of the practicing educator (Hubbard & Power, 1993).

The comparing and contrasting of teacher research and action research raised my awareness of my research process and caused me to ask more questions about myself as a teacher researcher. First, I realized that as a beginning teacher researcher, I envisioned a linear view of the teacher inquiry process. I had mentally flattened Lewin's cycle approach and saw a teacher research study as a series of progressive steps with publishing as a goal. Any additional questions that occurred along the way were put aside to be examined in another study, since my goal was to concentrate on my initial question.

Through Pat D'Arcy and Jack Whitehead, I discovered the work of Jean McNiff (1988). It was her visual spiral of action research that demonstrated to me that ongoing questions were a natural part of the process. With that picture in my mind, I learned to use the sudden and unplanned questions as signs pointing to new directions within my study. My work with the parent community demonstrates this reframing of my question and my ability to listen to my own questions as well as using them to redirect my entire research plan.

The second awareness that came from action research was the emphasis on social action. Jack introduced me to his own work and the work of Elliot (1994), Winter (1987), McNiff (1993), Laidlaw (1994), and others. Through readings and personal interactions, I gradually began to see the need to look beyond my classroom door. These particular action researchers modeled a world perspective of research based on democratic values that I had not encountered before. Within their work, they professed a broad and public purpose to their work. Susan Noffke (1992) contends:

> The intent of action research, as seen by a growing number of proponents, is to connect the work of teachers to issues of social,

economic, and political justice that are considered as embedded in the practice of teaching. (p. 15)

Jack Whitehead (1992) takes this idea one step further by adding the element of a personal and deliberate effort to work for the wider good.

> Whatever the new world order brings it is certain that what counts as educational knowledge will have a profound influence on whether or not the world is moving to a better place. The increasing number of people who are associated with action research movements throughout the world are committed to asking questions about improving their practice and to judging their effectiveness in relation to their contribution to the construction of a good social order. What impresses me about educational action research is the way in which individuals hold themselves both personally and socially accountable for their actions within a democratic forum. (p. 2)

These notions of taking a broader stance in regard to my personal and professional responsibility pushed me to examine my place in the educational world beyond my classroom, school, and local district. It is here that I'm currently finding my way. As chair of S-Step, I have the opportunity to use my understanding of community dynamics with a worldwide group of teacher educators. I hope that at the end of my two-year term, S-Step will be stronger because of my efforts.

Accepting the S-Step chair also allows me to live out the blending of beliefs I gained from teacher research and action research. For me, teacher research is a systematic reflective inquiry for the purpose of examining and improving the quality of my actions, my knowledge, and my spirit as a person and educator. As an action researcher, I understand and accept my responsibility to my fellow educators and those yet to enter the profession. This requires me to join a wider circle, to step out and place my understandings alongside theirs, and to add to the educative conversation. With these thoughts, I share this thesis.

The Trip, Part 4

I crossed off landmarks on the map, counting them as major milestones that brought us one step closer to our goal. Crossing the Alaskan border was a major

celebration. We fixed pizza in one of the bus's hubcaps because I couldn't find a baking sheet.

Three months after leaving Ohio, we crept into Fairbanks with a new tire, a rebuilt engine (many times), an overheated bus, two fussy preschoolers, one neurotic cat, and twenty-five dollars.

CHAPTER 3

UNCOVERING COMMUNITY: TREASURES IN THE SNOW

CREATING A CLASSROOM COMMUNITY

Note to the Reader

In this chapter, I take you with me into my sixth-grade classroom. I begin with three critical stories of my teaching career. Each illustrates a turning point in my understanding about community and about myself.

In the central part of this chapter, I use the metaphor of types of snow to organize my construction of community into my five essential elements: climate, communication, consensus, challenges, and celebrations. It is here, within my classroom, that I demonstrate how I draw upon classroom observations, student actions and my personal values to identify critical events. I then creatively work and rework the possibilities to gain new knowledge.

Another purpose of this chapter is to make my thinking visible to you so that you can join me and see all the facets in the development of the classroom community. I recount the successes and the problems I experience. I share my worries and I share my self-talk as I gather courage to try new thinking. I bring you into my persistent struggle to live out my values in front of twenty-seven sixth graders.

The chapter concludes with my feeling of successfully creating a community with my students. My creating community with my sixth graders provides a base of information from which to begin to facilitate the three other communities in this thesis as well as benchmarks to watch for and document.

Uncovering Community: Treasures in the Snow

Breakup, our term for spring, lasts about two weeks in Fairbanks. During that time, the hours of sunshine lengthen and the snow melts quickly. I can see the snow disappear daily as it shrinks from the side of the house and reveals more and more of the back porch. As the melting occurs, it uncovers hidden "treasures" from last winter. A mitten will suddenly appear, a soggy grocery list for Christmas dinner is uncovered, and many dog toys unexpectedly sprout all over the yard.

There will be one day when I notice that tiny shoots are poking through the last layers of crystal snow. Something green! After all the months of white, the tiny green spikes of grass are a colorful gift. I wouldn't have realized the grass was there if I hadn't been gathering the items exposed by the melting snow.

Thinking and writing about how I create community is like breakup season in my yard. The more I continue to consider what I do and how I do it and attempt to write it all down, the more I uncover. My snow continues to melt as I struggle to find the base of it all, my green shoots. But fall is where it actually begins.

Like breakup, fall happens in two weeks. In those two weeks the trees turn a stunning yellow, leaves dry, fall, and crackle underfoot. Suddenly the trees stand bare and empty waiting for the first flakes of snow. So I invite you into my yard. Come spend the winter with me and watch as it settles in. Then join in the celebration of breakup as I find forgotten items uncovered in the melting snow and search to discover the green shoots of community. Let us begin with critical stories in my teaching life.

Word Munchers

"Hmmm, what is this?" I asked, noticing the decorated folder on Julie's desk. In colorful letters the folder read, "Word Munchers. We munch on words."

"It's our group name and motto and now we're working on our logo," she replied. In her writing group, Alex, Stacy, and John were busily sketching various views of apples. *How did this group accomplish the task of composing a group motto so quickly? The rest of the groups are still beginning.*

I looked around the room. This was our second day together, and as I had learned in the Alaska State Writing Institute this past summer, now was the time to form those all-important writing response groups. These would be the foundation of my writing program for the year. One of my writing gurus, Lucy Calkins, assured me through her articles and books that, yes, indeed, writing groups were essential to every

writing classroom. I carefully read accounts of her students moving with enthusiasm into small groups, putting heads together to brainstorm ideas, writing with skill, sharing their writing, and then even editing together. That's what I wanted for this class, but what I saw was quite different from Lucy's description.

The group by the rats' cage were kicking each other under the table, sort of like soccer without the ball. Ben's group sat in silence, looking at the blank folder lying in the middle of his desk. Hannah's group, gathered by the windows, was a bit better. Three of the members were talking, but Reggie had his chair pulled back and was drawing bombing planes on his notebook. Eddy dominated his group with his charm while Anna, Stephanie, and Jessica listened in complete adoration to his description of his basketball skill. The final group, nestled among the coats and boots, argued about the merits of "the Rams" or "the Chargers." They were equally divided and neither side was willing to give in. I couldn't face them. I returned to Julie's group and watched. *Why can they do this and the others can't?* They finished their logo sketches and had them in the middle of their desks. Together they talked about the merits of each one. *They are sharing their ideas. Each one can see the pictures. They have their heads together. They disagree but are willing to compromise. No one is trying to outdo the other. They want to complete the task.* With those observations in mind, I went from group to group to make suggestions. Heads nodded while I talked with them, but problems returned as soon as I left. Most groups finally got something down, but it was clearly a frustrating experience for me and for the class. Not for Julie's group, however. They continued to talk about it on the way out the door for recess.

I collapsed on my chair. *This isn't the way it's supposed to go. This is my second year of teaching; I should know how to handle students by now. I think Lucy Calkins' students were really forty-three-year-old past Pulitzer Prize winning midgets. I need to do something here.* **That's as far as I got that day, but what was important about my thinking was that it was the first time that I consciously examined a troubling issue and explored ways to solve the problem.**

Throughout the year, I followed the development of Julie's group. I watched carefully how they worked together, what they did, and how they talked to each other. When I discovered something significant, I would visit each group and "impart" my new discovery. The other groups improved to varying degrees, but they never developed the ease with which Julie, Alex, John, and Stacy worked together.

I spent the following summer thinking about the class. On a clear July day on my back porch, I reviewed the dilemma of the writing groups: *OK, what makes sense here? What do I know? I know that Julie, Alex, John, and Stacy knew each other before coming to class. They were in the same class last year and lived close together. That probably helped. I arbitrarily put people together who probably didn't know each other and expected them to dive in and work cooperatively to complete a task. So it makes sense that we have to get to know each other first. We need to know everyone in the class since initially I don't know how the groups will be arranged. So, whole group knowledge is important. We get to know each other and feel comfortable; what next? What would I want as a student? As a very shy student, I felt better working with one person rather than a whole group. So if they work with partners for a while to build up confidence and learn how to discuss, compromise, and share, then after a while they would be ready for a group of four. I will test this out in the fall and see what will happen.* **Unknowingly, this was my initial step with action research as defined by McNiff (1988). I identified a concern (cooperation within the writing groups). I visualized a possible solution (all the steps mentioned above). In the fall, I would carry out my vision, assess the results, make any necessary changes so that students are more successful when working in writing groups, and then add the knowledge to my teaching practice.**

The Haircut

John, one of the last to arrive one chilly morning in November, walked reluctantly into the room and sat down. Head down, not looking at anyone, he pulled out a book and began to read. *He has his hat on! He knows it is a school rule not to wear hats. What's going on here? He's never done this before. I'll give him a few minutes. His self-esteem is too fragile for me to go barging in; maybe a friend will remind him.* Reggie passed by and reminded John to take his hat off. John turned red, mumbled something about a haircut and kept his hat on. He looked at me out of the corner of his eye. *Ah, that's the problem. Another "military" haircut. Okay, hat stays on; I won't say anything. Let him decide when to take it off. If I'm asked by another teacher, I'll say it's a medical problem.* John kept his hat on all day. He did get teased about it from the other kids, but he was able to fend them off. *I feel really sorry for John. I know how embarrassed he must feel. When I was in the fourth grade, I got a permanent that was a disaster. I looked like Little Orphan Annie and wanted to hide in the closet for weeks. He needs to know that this will be okay and will pass.* Before

he left for home, I wrote him a short note telling him of my experience and that one good thing about hair is that it always grows back. I slipped it in his homework folder as he was getting ready for home.

I forgot all about the haircut until four weeks later. At a parent conference, John's father had the note. He told me that John had shared the note with him and told his father that he was really touched that I would be that concerned about him. John's father wanted to thank me for taking time for his son. **That astounded me. I was not aware of the kind of power I held in that room. I was suddenly conscious that I could make students' lives easier or I could make them very difficult. At that point, I understood how very important it was for me to be careful how I use the power of my position. I had a heavy responsibility of which I was totally unaware until the conversation with John's father. I began to thoughtfully and carefully examine my actions.**

Eric and the Dancers

"Hey, Jim [the teacher across the hall], let's sign up for this. We don't often have the opportunity for the kids to work with dancers. Besides, it looks like an all-day program. We can drop them off at the gym and have the whole day to get caught up on journals and grading papers." Jim agreed and we signed our classes up for the next Wednesday. Wednesday 8:45 a.m. arrived. We marched our classes down the hall *(Ah, a clean desk by 2:30).* The dance director made us come in with our students. *Wait a minute. This isn't the plan. I have things to do. I'm not a dancer.* But that wasn't how it was to be. Jim and I spent the entire day with the students. I'm glad we were expected to stay because I would have missed something crucial if I had been back in my room grading papers.

In my third year of teaching, I was very worried about Eric. He arrived in my class sullen and withdrawn, and nothing I could do would draw him out. The first day of school, he colored his name card entirely black. This was how he felt about school. I learned that he had been retained and that accounted for him being so much larger than the others. He reminded me of a large Saint Bernard puppy; he didn't quite know what to do with his hands and his feet. Eric barely spoke and, if left to himself, would never work with anyone. I was determined not to let him have another "bad" school year, and as I was to discover, the opportunity to dance was perfect for Eric.

By 9:30 a.m. in the gym, we were all flinging ourselves across the floor, running, jumping, and swirling with feathers, scarves, and ribbons. *What fun. Look at*

Amneris. She's the quietest person in the room and look at her. All smiles and giggles. We quickly ate lunch and then pulled together one last routine for our performance. In this routine, we created a huge human pyramid with strobe lights bouncing around the walls. The choreographer selected Eric for the pivotal strength position. *Look at him! I can't believe it's Eric. He's actually touching other people. Okay, Eric, just get through the performance and don't mess up. You've got to be wonderful here.* I realized that Eric needed to be successful at this. This would probably determine his fate for the rest of the year. We performed for the rest of the school and left the gym with applause surrounding us. It was an incredible day for all of us, but especially for Eric. Back in our room, we sat on the floor and talked about the experience. Throughout our discussion, Eric heard praise and compliments on his position in the pyramid number. With each comment, Eric sat a little straighter. He sailed out of the room at the end of the day.

The room is nice and quiet, and I lie on the floor assessing the sore muscles. *What a wonderful day. I'll be so stiff and sore tomorrow I'll barely be able to crawl, but it was worth it. Wonder how Eric will be tomorrow? Probably did the smartest thing of my careerñto come back here and talk about the performance. Eric needed to hear others talking about him. I needed to hear it. The kids were much more perceptive about him than I thought. But the talking part, the talking part was the best. We came together today because we accomplished something. The kids didn't want to leave; how wonderful.*

The day of dance changed Eric, and it changed the rest of us. Eric began to see himself as a worthwhile person, and the others began to accept him within the class. As a whole class, we became something special. We were the "dancers of the school." **There were two essential happenings within the dance experience that shaped my thinking. The first was the performance. The fact that we, as a class, had to perform for a live audience drew us together. Plus we all had to work together to be successful. Eric was as important as Amneris. The second essential event happened by chanceñthe discussion before we left for home. The talk reinforced all our good feelings about being together, and this was especially significant for Eric. After the students left, I realized that I could create magical opportunities like this. I didn't have to wait for them to somehow happen. I also needed to devise a way to consistently incorporate whole group reflection time into the daily schedule.**

The previous stories illustrate my awakening to the concept of community. It came slowly and sometimes painfully, but by my third year of teaching, I knew that a classroom community was absolutely essential for myself and my students. Using my knowledge about the teacher research process as outlined by Hubbard and Power (1993), my role or power, dialogue, and purposeful action as a foundation, I can now, each year, purposely create a living active community of learners.

In the fall, my yard is covered with a variety of vegetation: prickly bright red rose hips, feathery fireweed, and dry vetch. Birch and cottonwood leaves litter the ground like small yellow disks. All the plants in my yard are waiting for the rigors of winter, when the snow will envelop them until spring.

Similar to the varieties of vegetation in my yard, every student brings an individual perspective to the classroom community. Together as a class, they create a unique diversity. My teaching community is ethnically and geographically diverse. Within the school, there are Asian, Hispanic, Caucasian, and African-American students, and they come to Alaska from all parts of the world. Some families see this as a wonderful opportunity, while others view Alaska as a foreign country and never leave the Army post.

Often, by the time students arrive in my sixth grade class, they have attended five other schools, and at most, they will stay in Alaska for four years before they move on with their families to their next post. Students frequently move during the school year; two years ago, out of a class of twenty-one, I had only five students who stayed with me the entire year. The continual shifting dynamics of personalities as students leave and new students arrive requires me to have a clear vision of community building so all of us can be active and positive members of the family.

Annui: Constructing the Climate

Winter begins quickly in Fairbanks. One day, there will be a soft blue sky and gentle sun, then the next morning all the plants and trees will be covered with a layer of frost. The definite chill in the air tells of coming snow. The first snow is usually soft and delicate and lightly covers the ground and leaves. The Inuit people call it *annui,* meaning falling snow. The *annui* is a compassionate and gentle prediction of what's to come.

Like the *annui,* my work before the students arrive on the first day of school predicts what is to happen during the next nine months. I begin by creating a gentle physical environmental climate that encourages the development of community.

Physical Environment

At Christmas time, during my first year of teaching, I asked my class to line up to go to their scheduled music class down the hall. The class quickly did so, except for Ricardo. Ricardo was a seventeen-year-old in a ten-year-old body. Streetwise, always dressed in black, he found school oppressing and irrelevant to his life. I found him standing beside the bulletin board in the front of the room. Watching him gently stroking the flocked gold Christmas paper, I was amazed at his expression. It was pure wonderment. He turned to look at me and said, "What is this?" I explained that it was wrapping paper for Christmas gifts. With that he left and went to music. *He's never shown any interest or gentleness to anything before. How strange that he's intrigued with the paper. I used it on the bulletin board because it was bright and festive and available. Wonder what else I could do with the room setting to interest him?* Throughout the rest of December, Ricardo continued to rub the paper when he thought no one was watching. This incident changed how I viewed the room environment. No longer was it a place to decorate, but it became a living stage to construct for learning. **For me, powerful learning seems to arrive from small moments, moments that create striking visual images in my mind. I can still see Ricardo, one finger extended, ever so gently touching the velvet paper.**

Using Ricardo as my mental guide and with the desire to create a classroom community, each fall I begin setting the stage in my classroom. The room is a tool to facilitate community growth, so I spend a great deal of time arranging and decorating the room. I think about two fundamental elements before school begins. First, the room should be inviting and welcoming. So as the students and I walk through the door each day, we should think, "Ah, I'm glad to be here." The room should also fill the senses. All the "Ricardos" should find something intriguing in every corner. Secondly, items within the room must be accessible to the students. Both these elements, invitation and accessibility, help to build a community.

The Senses

Visual presentation is vital. For me, this means that the room is bright, colorful and full of interesting things. I choose a theme that visually unites the room. This year the room theme is rainbow colors. Multicolored ribbons hang from the ceiling, outlining a reading area filled with primary colored pillows. Table surfaces, including my desk, are covered by rainbow fabric. Above the chalkboard, sweeping pieces of fabric highlight the writing process steps. The colorful artwork that is

scattered around the room is carefully crafted by local Alaskan artists. Large green plants fill the corners and the tops of cabinets. *I want my students to see something beautiful no matter where they look. Our winters are dark and there are weeks when it's too cold to go out. All of us spend a great deal of time in this room, so if we can't have sun outside, we definitely can have sunshine inside.*

Sounds play an important role in my room. The tape recorder sits out on the shelf where all of us can easily keep music playing throughout the day. The soft music holds us together as we focus on our work. It provides a soothing background as we quietly read or an energizer for group work in the afternoons. Wind chimes hang above the bookcase and by the door, creating gentle tones.

The room is filled with textures, from the carpet on the floor to the individual pillows on each chair. In the fall, when the students come to my house for a two-day camp out, each constructs a pillow for their chair at school. Baskets of stuffed animals are scattered among the shelved books. A large teddy bear looks out the window, and a moose puppet gazes at us from atop the mailboxes. Each of these has been read to, become a cast member in plays, had a part of science experiences, and been confided in. I've found that students need things to touch, brush, pet, and cuddle, even in sixth grade. Occasionally I see a student pick up a stuffed animal and curl up on the floor to read or tell it secrets. It's generally a student whom I would least suspect. Ricardo is still here with me.

As I create the environment, I'm not only creating it for myself, because I want to be comfortable in the room. I also want the students to be comfortable, too. It shows the students that I care about them, that I've considered their needs and created a place especially for them. **So what I'm really doing is modeling for my students that I love being in this place called school. As an adult I choose to be here, and I'm inviting them to join me. I'm trying to break their preconceived notions of what school has been like and to present the possibilities of what it might become. I've since discovered that some in the business community are trying a similar approach (Hickman & Silva, 1984; Peters & Austin, 1985; Peters & Waterman, 1982). The corporate leader(s) are exploring various ways to change long-lived notions about work through personal modeling and showing care for employees.**

Accessibility

The other physical environment element I purposely plan is the issue of accessibility for students. I try to organize the classroom in such a way that it allows students to easily use everything and also have areas that allow students to feel comfortable. *This year I need to have my teacher references more accessible. As I learn to stand back and let students pursue their own learning, they need these kinds of books. The class last year just took them over. I think they assumed that since they were in the room, they could be used. That's true! I need to make it more explicit this year and consider these shelves as extensions of the class library.* Everything in the room is arranged in a way that allows the students to obtain what they need to learn. Hall passes are kept in a basket by the door. Phone books are stored in the bookcase by the phone. The six bookcases hold all sorts of reading material, from poetry to motorcycle magazines to dictionaries. Each of the six cooking tubs contains the basic implements for cooking, which are also handy for science experiments. Having items freely available allows students to be more independent and more creative in their work. It also demonstrates my trust in them as responsible learners. *If I want my students to be independent learners and if I want them to use all these items, I must find a way to set them out for students to see.* **All these items are tools of a working community. We wouldn't be a community if I remained in control of everything.**

I need to think how to arrange the desks so that we can have our meeting area and not have to move so many pieces of furniture. I'll have twenty-five students, so we'll need lots of floor space. Space is a continual problem. My students have individual desks that can be quickly moved in and out of many configurations. I've never yet been able to arrange them so that I have a designated meeting place. We always end up moving desks. I begin this task so optimistically. I believe that if I think hard enough I'll discover the key to the space problem. *We need cozy corners for partner work and book talks. We need private areas for quiet work. We need space for our morning opening time. The computer needs to be in another place. Last year it was really crowded when kids wrote pieces together. I need more room. Wonder how many bribes of chocolate chip cookies it would take for the janitor to build me an addition to this room.* **Maybe the "crowdedness" is part of community. The fact that as a group we have to move desks so that we all can be seen is just as important as the meeting itself. It shows that we honor each**

person in the group. I should view this as a positive aspect of community rather than a problem.

The room arrangement and appearance mirror how I view life within this room. If I want community to happen, then I have to physically construct the room so that it enhances the idea of community. I have the power to arrange this any way I please, and the arrangement will have a direct effect on the relationships within these walls (Smith & Kearny, 1994).

Api: Forging Communication

About the middle of October, the snowfall begins in earnest. The snow on the ground, called *api,* begins to accumulate. As the first flakes reach the ground, the delicate edges disappear, and the flakes become small granules of ice, the foundation layer for the rest of the year's snow. Sunny days alternate with deep, overcast snowy days. *Api* builds layer upon layer. My beginning conversations with my students are my *api.* These conversations set the tone, model interactions, and begin the formation of trust that starts to build the community, layer upon layer upon layer.

One afternoon during my second year of teaching in preparation for our medieval festival later that week, my sixth graders and I sat on the floor making crepe paper vines for our town wall. It was -30 F. outside, so we were working and chatting through our recess time. Stacey turned to me and said, "You know, Mrs. A., you're just like one of us."

Intrigued, I asked her, "What do you mean?"

"Well, you talk to us, you know—like people."

She kept on twisting leaves into her vine, but her comment made my heart pound. *So I talk to them like people. But that's what they are. I like to know what they're thinking and what they do outside of class. I genuinely like them and like knowing about them. How could I teach them if I didn't know them?*

In the first several years of examining community in my classroom, I learned that community is formed and shaped with open and honest communication. It's so essential that we learn to talk to each other as fellow learners that I don't want to delay getting that process started, so I model and set the tone before school officially starts. I create an opportunity to meet the students outside of the traditional school setting by writing letters.

Beginning the Communication

Letters

One August, after my first year of teaching, a fellow teacher stopped by the house to return some math materials. Seeing a stack of letters, Lisa said, "Writing to your new students already? How can you write to them? You don't know them yet." I mumbled something but felt irritated by her comment. *But I do know them. I know they are in sixth grade, I know they live on an Army base, I know they ride their bikes, I know they are probably a bit worried about sixth grade and what that will mean. I can easily write to them, because I care about them and want to know them.* **Questions like this force me to articulate to myself, and sometimes to others, the reasons behind my actions. They make me think beyond my basic intuition.** Thus began my practice of writing to my students. I initially started with having the letters on the desks of each student, waiting for them as they arrived on the first day of school.

As I started my third year of teaching, however, I decided that I wanted to contact my students before the start of school. I asked Gail, a teacher across the hall, to join me. We agreed to write each student a letter and follow up with a home visit. This created quite a stir in the office. Traditionally, my school did not give class lists to teachers until two days before school begins. We were told the lists wouldn't be official or ready until the day before school. We needed them at least a week ahead so that the letters would arrive in time. After much prodding, pushing, and pleading, we got our lists.

The following year, the school had a new principal and new office staff, and Gail was no longer interested in contacting students before school began. I was on my own. I knew what I wanted. I wanted to write letters to my students to welcome them to sixth grade, to send them a supply list, and to inform them that I would be visiting them on the Saturday before school. *This will be like asking for the moon. What can I say that will persuade the principal of the value of meeting the kids ahead of time? She's already said that no class lists will be given out early and not to ask the secretaries for even a peek. I need that list! This will throw the whole school into chaos. The secretary will be upset because I'm not following procedure, and this won't help my relationship with other teachers either. They want their lists, too. Is it worth the repercussions? Yes. I'm committed to the value of meeting students before school begins. Besides, maybe another teacher will see the benefit and want to do this also.*

The principal listened as I explained my reasoning. She agreed—it wasn't a resounding yes, but it was a yes. *Yay! But now on to the secretary. I have to figure out a way to make this simple and not disturb her routine. She has the power to make everything simple or difficult.* With a plate of cookies in hand, I made my request. I offered to go through all the sixth grade student rosters and make a list of my identified students. I wouldn't disrupt her paperwork, and I would do this during a time when she didn't need the list. With great misgivings, she agreed. *I think it was the cookies.* Now, eleven years later, I receive my list before school is out in May, typed with names, addresses, and telephone numbers. The school has changed secretaries three times since my first request, and it must be part of the written job description because now there is never any question. It's always provided. **This was my first experience in taking a public position for an idea I valued. I cared and respected my students so much that I was willing to try to make an institutional change in order to make the first day of the new school year easier for them.**

In general, writing letters to my students serves several purposes. It sets communication tone and interaction pattern, it shows my caring for the individual child, and it demonstrates my value of literacy. I agree with Palmer (1993) as he claims that

> Good teachers also bring students into community with themselves and with each other—not simply for the sake of warm feelings, but to do the difficult things that teaching and learning require. (p. xvii)

The letters that I write now begin to create a bond between us that will allow us to tackle the learning challenges that lie ahead.

My writing is carefully constructed to model tone and interaction patterns. *Let's see. Which will I use—the bicycle or cloud stationary? Bicycle, I think. It's colorful and appeals to this age, and then I can also tell them I found it in England this summer. I love writing these letters. Keep it short, bright, and positive. Emphasize the "looking forward to meeting you" part. I need to make everyone feel welcome. I'll add a sticker to the envelope to make it eye-catching and special.* I've learned to use small stationary, half the size of normal paper. Then my short message fills the page and appears to be a longer letter than it really is. I usually have from twenty-five to twenty-seven students, so the task can seem never-ending if the letters are too long. *I have to structure the task to keep it fun for me as well.* I always begin

with a "Hi" and end with "Love, Mrs. Austin." The "Hi" demonstrates informality and friendliness, and the "love" shows my unconditional caring for the student. Later the "Mrs. Austin" will become Mrs. A; but in this first letter, it's essential that they know exactly who I am.

Enclosed in the letter is a supply list. This supply list is a combination of words and pictures. *I don't want my students to feel intimidated by not knowing how to read the list, so the pictures will help if there's a problem. It will also help any of my bilingual parents. Besides, the pictures make it seem less serious and official.* **Again, I'm demonstrating my respect for each individual student.**

When I was in elementary school, I remember the excitement of receiving a letter written especially to me and me alone. I want to share that kind of excitement with my students. Reading and writing can be enjoyable and meaningful at the same time. When they receive this letter, they don't know it, but they will be receiving a letter from me on a daily basis, and they will also write to me each day. *I picture them opening the letter and reading my note. As they read, they are constructing their half of our personal relationship. They now belong to me and I belong to them. We are a team.* **I am a team member with each of them. Now I'm on twenty-five teams, while they are on only one. It will be my job to expand this initial team to include others. In the beginning I'm the pivotal person for all teams, but as we create a community together, I will become less and less important. In a sense, this is how my communities begin. It begins with a relationship between two people.**

Home Visits

Within the letter, I also mention that I will be visiting their home sometime on Saturday. The first year of my home visits, Gail, the teacher across the hall, and I decided to do them on the same day, the Saturday before school began. Enclosing the notice in the letters to the students, we waited until THE day. That first year, I spent many nights wondering how it was going to work. *Gail is so outgoing and pleasant. I'm not. She can talk about doorknobs and sound great. What am I going to talk about? What do I say when they open the door? What if they don't open the door? What if they have a loose dog? What if I can't find the street? What if I go to the wrong door? Do I go in or stand on the porch? Boy, I hope it doesn't rain. I think I'll wear my denim skirt and striped blouse. It looks efficient without being intimidating. What if I have nothing to say, and what if they don't say anything?* Despite these

thoughts, there were two reasons I was determined to visit the homes. The first was my childhood memories of "the night before school." I remember lying in bed the night before school started, wondering nervously who my teacher would be and how I would find out and how I would be able to find the room. I didn't want my students to have those kinds of thoughts. The second reason was Gail. If she could do it, so could I. The day arrived and when we were done by late afternoon, I felt immensely successful. I found the right addresses, families were friendly, and I could converse with all of them.

A year later, Gail decided that her interests lay in other directions and discontinued home visits, but I still continue. I still get nervous the night before, and as I knock on the first door I wonder if I want to do this. I do. I've learned some tricks that make it easier. First, I ask my husband, son, or a friend who owes me a big favor to drive. The driver can plot the course to the next house while I'm in talking to the family, and also, having a person waiting in the car is a natural reason for not staying for supper. The driver also gives me confidence, so if for some reason I need help, that person is close by. I often carry a Polaroid camera with me and take a picture of the student and the family, and I usually have a flyer about the school's open house or the PTA's ice cream social. These items help provide conversation if I need it. Then, I've also learned to ask questions and share information. Since none of my parents are permanent residents of this community, I often ask questions about their view of Alaska, how long they will be staying, and their impressions about our winters. Their answers give me clues to their attitudes that may carry over into the school community. I also share information about me and my family, so the student and parents begin to see me as a person, not just "the teacher."

The visits last from a three-minute chat through the screen door to a twenty-minute conversation with all the members of the family. I've met the family dog; signed casts; toured houses; sampled homemade pie, cookies, and bread; and been invited to countless dinners, lunches, and teas. It's very difficult to turn down such hospitable invitations. I've learned it's best not to eat before I begin the home visits. Families even send treats out to Ken waiting in the car.

The year I visited Becky's home is the year I fully realized the importance of the home visits. Becky's mother met me at the door and welcomed me. I met her father, her fifth-grade sister, and her second-grade brother. But no Becky. When I asked about her, her mother told me that Becky was in the kitchen mopping the floor because "that was her job." The parents then told me that Becky was slow in school,

that she'd been retained, and that she had only attended special education classes. Her sister, however, was described (in detail) as being bright, intelligent, and in the gifted and talented program. *Wow! Becky and I have a lot of work to do. Self-esteem is going to be a major emphasis. She's never been included in a full-time classroom before; I'll need to gently introduce her to the routine and expectations. Most of all, I'll need to make sure she's with people who will be kind to her as we begin academic work. As she gains confidence in her ability, she can branch out. I also need to work with the parents to help them value her. I need to get into that kitchen and meet Becky!*

Home visits provide a window to our new community. Patterns begin to emerge as I look for common interests that will tie us all together. I begin to get a feel of the strengths of the class and areas that need concentration. Home visits ease the student into school. **I realize that the letters and the home visits demonstrate my care and respect for the students. By establishing our initial communicative dialogue outside of the formal school setting, the students enter a new year of school with an awareness of who I am and having had an individual opportunity to talk with me. The home visit allows me to know a bit about them before the rush of the first day. This provides me with time so I can more carefully and expertly consider my power as the pivotal team member.**

Sustaining the Conversation

Letters

Letters appear again on the first day of school. As the students come into the room for the first time, there is another letter of welcome on each desk. This ensures that any last-minute changes in the class roster or any student who registered that morning receives a letter from me. It's important that all receive a written personal welcome to the classroom.

And so we begin our life together . . . .

Greetings

Due to the size of my school, I go to a designated door each morning at 8:25 to walk the class to our room. I enjoy this time. As we near our classroom door, I step off to the side and greet each as he or she enters the room:

"Hi, Jessica, you're back! Are you feeling better?" *It's good to see her again. She's looking better. She'll need to catch up on missed work at recess.*

"Good morning, guys. Your noses are pink. Is it cold outside?" *It's nice to see them come in smiling. Wonderful, Tommy has a new coat.*

"Jacqueline, what did you think of last night's chapter? Wasn't it exciting?" *I love hearing about Jacqueline's views. She gets so involved.*

My purpose is to demonstrate through my direct eye contact and verbal interaction that I'm glad to see each individual student and ready to spend the day with them. **This morning ritual is like a signpost signaling a move into a different territory. Ralph Peterson (1992) points out that a ritual such as my morning greeting helps the students make that transition between home and school. In a sense, as the students cross the classroom threshold, I'm asking them not only to enter a specific learning environment, but to join me and the other students in a commitment to community life.**

Morning Notes

Each morning, the students find a letter from me giving them some bit of trivia information, usually a direction and a positive comment. The following note is a typical example:

> Good morning,
>
> Today is National Swine Day; remember to take a pig to lunch. Please turn in your Egyptian homework into the social studies bin. After homework check, we'll move into rows and silently read. Be sure and check the agenda. It's a bit different for today.
>
> I'm glad we're together today.
>
> Love,
>
> Mrs. A.

The morning letters on the board serve several purposes. The first is to focus the students as they enter the room. After a week or so, they know the routine of "reading the board." **The message acts as a transition catalyst. It pulls twenty-five separate people together by sharing information (we all now know**

something unusual), by requesting a common task, and by reinforcing a positive feeling. We reunite as a community each day as we read the letter.

The Agenda

The daily agenda also helps to focus us on our day together. Written on the side of the board in the front of the room, it looks like this:

Agenda
Opening
Meeting
Reading/Art/Writing
Recess/lunch
Math
Gym
Break—daily journals
Social Studies
2nd grade buddies
Family groups/jobs
Home

I believe the visual agenda invites the students into the events of the day, but also shows my respect for the pupils. There are no surprises. The agenda allows the students to plan for each part of our day together. With the agenda listed above, the students know they need their tennis shoes on for the gym time, and they are reminded that they will be writing in daily journals during their break, so they might want to think about what to write. They also know that we'll be meeting with our second-grade buddies after social studies, so they will need to have a book to read aloud by that time of the day.

In a way, the agenda is a way to share my thinking and planning for our community. While I begin the year writing the agenda, students seem to naturally take over the task sometime in November. Ownership of this task is an important milestone. I view their actions with this task as a beginning step in developing a social consciousness (Pierce & Gilles 1993) about their place within the class community. *Alyssa's job this week is to erase the board. Let's see if she does anything about the agenda. She should know by now that we're having music tomorrow. Great! She's*

making changes. She looks at me and smiles. Wonderful. I wonder if the group will realize that Alyssa did that. Let's see what happens tomorrow.

Once writing the agenda is assumed by the students, it's not unusual for them to confer with me and with other students about possible changes for the next day. The following is a typical example of this type of exchange and illustrates my willingness to step back and quietly support students to assume responsiblity.

Aaron: (Standing at the board at the end of the day, yelling across the room) Hey, Mrs. A., anything unusual for tomorrow?

Terri: I don't think so (walking closer, but continuing to check an assignment book). Check my calendar on the desk.

Aaron: Okay (looking at calendar). It says we have the counselor coming at 2:00. If she comes at 2:00, what are we going to do about sharing our projects?

Terri: Oh, no, I forgot. *This always happens—ten things happening all on the same day. The group can help solve the problem.* How long do you think the sharing will take? *I wonder what he'll say. He's not the most accurate in time estimation.*

Aaron: I don't know, maybe twenty-five minutes or so.

Terri: *I think it will much longer than that, but I may be underestimating the projects. Wonder what the others think?* Why don't you check with a couple of people and see when you can fit that in the schedule. It can't be during math because Mr. Cooney is coming in. *They need to know of the restrictions, too. Let's see how creative they can be.*

Aaron: Okay. Hey, Misty, we need to share project tomorrow. When do you think. . .

Terri: *Good. Misty will give him a better time, I think.*

Misty: Hey, everyone, listen! (The group stops doing their jobs and listens.) The counselor is coming tomorrow at 2:00, so if we want to share our projects, we need to do as many jobs at lunch as we can and end break five minutes early. Is that OK with everyone?

Class: (A few grumble, but all eventually agree.)

Aaron: (Looking at me) If we don't finish sharing tomorrow, could we continue the next day?

Terri: Better check the calendar.

The students assume responsibility for the whole community when they plan the schedule. There are enough constants that it's not an overwhelming task, and yet there are enough variations that require the students to work and plan together. Students must consider the good of the community over their own personal interests. It's a good measure of community to see if they can do that.

I continually watch for opportunities, such as this calendar event, which allow students to share in management of the classroom. I have to be careful because in the rush of the day it is often easier for me to do the task. But if I truly value student initiative, and I do, then I have to be very mindful of my actions in relation to potential student opportunities.

Daily Journals

I love responding to student journals. The students and I write daily, and while they write in their journal, I write in mine. As we finish, the students turn their journals in for me to answer that evening, and I place my journal on the chalkboard tray. Any student can pick it up and write a response to my entry. I am purposely modeling trust. In my journal, I write in an honest and forthright manner, and I am trusting my thoughts will be responded to in a caring way. The sharing of my journal is also a good reminder for me of the courage necessary to share oneself.

The students have the opportunity to learn about me as they respond in my journal. It's a written relationship that requires both the student and me to be initiators as well as responders (Palmer 1993). We both need to be actively involved to keep the dialogue continuing. In January, I wrote:

Dear Reader,

The play parts were issued today. Everyone seems grumpy about it. It makes me not want to do the play at all. I thought it would be fun;

instead people don't see the fun of being in it. Working together for the class trip should be the goal.

Love,

Mrs. A.

Alyssa offered words of advice:

Dear Mrs. A.

I agree! Well, I think it's just because it's Monday. We'll shape up tomorrow!

Sincerely,

Alyssa

Sometimes a student will offer a solution to a problem I've shared in my writing.

Dear Reader,

It's warmer! YEA! Maybe spring really is here after all. I hope it stays warm for our walks tomorrow and Wednesday. Today's been an interesting day, full of surprises. I forgot that Mark was coming today. The college class is tonight. I'm worried because I'm not prepared. I need to think of something to talk about.

Love,

Mrs. A.

Dear Mrs. A.

Why don't you talk about the trip for a little while and ask if anyone wants to come with us? I know you'll think of something.

Josh

I learn so much about my students through journal conversations. The topics are broad and vary from day to day. By the fourth week of school, Mark was an enthusiastic journal writer, and eagerly told me much about his life outside of school.

September 27

Dear Mrs. A,

How are you? I'm fine. Do you read the sports page cause if you do, you know who the Rams are, they are the choice football team. We have to scrimmage them tomorrow and they are going full speed that means they are going to hit us hard, the hardest they can.

Sincerely,

Mark

That evening, I responded:

Dear Mark,

I've heard you and De talk about the Rams during lunch. They sound tough. Good luck at your scrimmage tonight. I'll think positive thoughts. Do you want to stay after school to do your homework? That way it will be all done before you go home, and you won't have to try and do it after the game.

Love,

Mrs. A.

Sometimes, I hear about academic discoveries:

Jan. 27

Dear Mrs. A,

I understand the ratios a little more today. It was fun doing the measuring.

Love,

Amanda

Dear Amanda,

I like the measuring, too. It was fun to measure all our ears. Congratulations with ratios! We'll continue to work on them in class for the next week or so. They should get easier to understand as we go along. Let me know if you get confused and we'll review.

Thanks for doing Neil's job today.

Love,

Mrs. A.

Throughout sixth grade, issues of feelings arise:

Feb. 24

Dear Mrs. A.

I'm in love. April is just wonderful. Should I tell her how I feel before I move? What if she doesn't like me?

Love,

Lovesick Dustin

Dear Lovesick Dustin,

I agree, April is a special person. Since today is your last day, you might want to talk to her or write her a letter.

I hope you write to us. I wrote my address in your new journal. Let us know all about your new school and your trip to Texas. You'll be enjoying the warm sun while we still have snow. We will miss you.

Love,

Mrs. A.

As the above three entries show, I discover what is important in each student's life and then respond with respect and care. The information allows me to know each student individually and gives me clues as to behavior patterns, interest areas, and personal relationships. The more information I know, the better I can meaningfully respond and structure my actions and the classroom activities to support each student. **The daily journal writing, started as a writing activity to increase writing fluency (Calkins, 1986), provides me with a window into individual lives. The journals give me a background or underlying context for attitudes and behavior in the classroom, and this additional knowledge allows me to move the students into being participants in a community more quickly.**

Sometimes it's not easy to establish an ongoing dialogue. Some students enter into the conversation enthusiastically while others need some time and persuading. It's here that my patience is tested, and I internally search for creative solutions. For the first five days of school, this was Tom's entry:

Sept. 10

Dear Mrs. A,

I am fine. How are you?

Tom

It's evident that I need to model authentic writing for Tom. It looks like he's had little experience in writing letters. So I responded:

Sept. 10

Dear Tom,

I'm terrific. I look forward to our camping trip next week. My two dogs will be coming with us on our hike. Do you have any pets? Would you be willing to help Ken get the supper fire going on Thursday night? I know he'll need help gathering branches.

Love,

Mrs. A.

The next day, Tom responded:

Sept. 11

Dear Mrs. A,

I am fine. How are you?

Tom

This continued for weeks. No matter what I did, what questions I asked, what I modeled, Tom always responded, "I am fine. How are you?" *What's going on? I've done all my usual routines and nothing. He's not entering into the conversation here. What will happen if I push him hard? Either he will refuse to write for the rest of the year or he'll see how silly his writing is. I have nothing to lose except a year of "I am fine. How are you?"* Finally, I wrote,

Nov. 3

Dear Tom,

I find your journal entries very boring. We're not talking together. You're just writing words. From now on, I will respond in a similar

way that you write. I would love to talk with you in your journal, but I'm tired of doing all the work.

Love,

Mrs. A.

The next day, Tom wrote:

Nov. 4

Dear Mrs. A,

I am fine. How are you?

Tom

I'm sick of this. OK, he gets the same response.

Nov. 4

Dear Tom,

I am fine. How are you?

Mrs. A.

We had this same response for two more weeks. Finally Tom wrote,

Nov. 15

Dear Mrs. A,

Why do you write the same thing every day?

Tom

Finally! The boy knows how to write something else. Now we can talk. Our conversations changed. Tom never wrote long entries, but he began to talk about issues that interested him.

Dear Mrs. A.,

Yesterday was my sister's birthday. She turned 5 years old. She got a lot of good birthday presents.

Tom

Dear Tom,

She'll be starting school next year, right? That will make changes in your family. Wish her a happy birthday for me.

Love,

Mrs. A.

It's very important to me that students join me in a continuing conversation. If we're going to work together all year, we must devise a way for honest communication. **But I also need to realize that every path of communication will vary with each student. In the beginning, I'm their only team member. They need to trust me and see me as their strong ally and supporter. When we trust each other, then we can move into honest relationships with others in the classroom. Trust is an essential value in my classroom.**

As the students become more at ease in writing to me in the daily journals, I begin to look for signs of community. I look for their use of collective pronouns, such as we and our, and for positive comments about others in the classroom. In my responses, I've modeled this for them, but when I begin to see it in their writing, I know they are beginning to see themselves as part of the community. By January, Ben had not yet accepted his role within the community, as shown by his journal entry:

Dear Mrs. A.

I know you are not finished with the play, but I hope I have more things to say than the commander. I think he has only two parts. Mrs. Austin, if there are more parts, can I have them?

Sincerely,

Ben

Ben's journal entry tells me that I need to continue demonstrating the benefits of community with Ben. **I notice I wrote "with Ben" rather than "for Ben". I think this is highly significant in how I regard my relationship with my students. It's in the act of working together that we will discover ways for Ben to see himself as part of the community.** His focus on his individual part tells me he doesn't quite see this role (regardless of the size) as contributing to this community effort. He hasn't moved into that reciprocal interdependence (Thompson, 1967) where he sees that his efforts will directly support and aid the work of all the others. I've found that each student joins the community at different times. Amanda was a student who quickly assimilated the idea of community membership into her life. In late September, she wrote:

Dear Mrs. A,

I've never had such a bad feeling in my stomach this afternoon. We had to run another mile. My time was 12 min. 22 seconds. Chuck was the first one to finish. His time was 8 min. 8 seconds. What a good time!

Amanda

Amanda not only sees herself as a member of the community that had to run, but she acknowledges Chuck's fast time. This is a signpost. As I read journals, I mentally note the students who indicate an acceptance of community membership and watch for the students who have not. The journal entries not only allow me to stay in touch with each student on a personal level, but also allow me to see the person in relationship to the working community. **Now I clearly see the community picture. The community itself is a living organism composed of relationships between the students and of relationships between the students and myself. I have to be aware of all the layers of relationships to fully understand the "wellness" of our community. I need to have this information so that I can move our community forward or help mend the weak areas.**

Occasional Notes

It was a difficult week, the second week of being inside, with no recess, no break from each other because of -40 degree weather. The desks were back in rows because the kids couldn't work together, and I spent most of my time disciplining. The kids were nasty, I was nasty, and it didn't look like the weather was going to change. While driving home in the dense ice fog, I considered possibilities. *This can't go on. The weather is destroying the community. I have to change our attitude somehow. I have several choices. I could bundle them all up for a jog around the school, but that would mean that I would have to go, too. Nope, too cold. Or, I could leave the room and let them fight out all their frustration and energy. Don't think so. Parents would be concerned about that one. What could I do to change the focus? I think tonight I'll write individual letters to the kids. I'll force myself to say something positive about each one. I'll use the bright yellow cow stationery and leave it on their desks in the morning. It will be a neat surprise when they arrive.* **In reflecting upon this seemingly small incident, I'm struck with the enormity of what I learned. I knew something was wrong and then worked to change the situation. I realized that when I require myself to change my perspective, it opens the way for the students to change theirs. This awareness, however, leads to a more significant realization. It's the importance of critically examining myself, knowing that this personal understanding will influence the events in my classroom. It was a "secret hidden in plain sight" (Palmer, 1998, p. 3) that I was just beginning to uncover.** The weather did break several days later, but the individual notes helped us change our attitudes. The students appreciated the kindness and in turn began to show kindness to others.

Pukak: Building Consensus

As the snowfalls accumulate in November and December, the snow closest to the ground changes. Water molecules evaporate and move to the surface, leaving the underlying crystals loose and light, similar to the structure of granulated sugar. This delicate type of snow is called pukak, and since it holds so much air, it serves as an insulator. It keeps a constant temperature throughout the winter no matter what the air temperature may be. Pukak is also unstable. With all the air pockets, it's quite easy for people to fall through the surface layer. Building classroom consensus is as delicate and as unstable as pukak. I've never thought about consensus in this way before, but I can see that when the students and I learn how to agree, disagree, and reach a

common understanding, we have a stabilizing factor in the room. As we're learning to do this, I must be willing to take risks and fall through the snow once in a while until we are all knowledgeable in the process.

Identifying Values

There are several tasks we begin during the first weeks of school to practice building consensus. The first is to establish class values. The values become our guide and our goals for classroom success. Belenky, et al. (1986) contend "that you must first begin to hear your own inner voice in order to understand the importance of drawing out the voices of others" (p. 176). If I want to create values with the students, I must first clearly know what I believe. Early in August, about a month before our school starts, I sit down and identify my own values.

What I value in my classroom:

1. Joy of Learning

I want my students to be as excited as I am when I discover something new. I want them to see the fun in working at a hard task and then succeeding. I view the world as an exciting place full of interesting ideas. I want my students to see learning as opportunities and challenges.

2. Sense of Community

A community is a group of supportive, encouraging individuals who will put the good of the group above their personal gain. I firmly believe that with the support of a compassionate community, people will take more risks and learn much more than they will when they are on their own. It's a place where we won't be judged solely on an individual action. A community shares common experiences and goals.

3. Power of Literacy

Reading, writing, listening, and speaking are power tools. I want my students to be active in their education, and one way is to have a strong understanding of these tools.

Reading is a way to increase knowledge, a way to have an enjoyable experience and a way to expand imagination. I want them to lose themselves, to become a part of that story, to groan when we have to stop reading. I want to read broadly and to taste all that's out there; I want the same for my students.

Writing can influence and persuade. It can instruct and affect others. Writing is also a way to clarify thinking and reach new understandings. It's important to write well, so that the students and I can enter the arena of influence. I want my students to

see themselves as writers and that this mysterious act of writing can be mastered and enjoyed.

Listening is vital if we truly want to understand others. I want listening to go beyond the surface of the words. It's important that we look to the meanings behind.

Speaking is another way of sharing understandings and clarifying meanings. Through verbalization of thought, I can impact others and create change. I want my students to be able to do this with confidence and ease.

4. Honesty to Self and Others

I want my students to look at themselves clearly and with frank truth. By being thoroughly candid with themselves, they can revel in their strengths and focus on areas of growth. It's better for them to have a true picture of themselves than to rely on other's opinions. I marvel and envy the Olympic ice skaters. Their performance is done so effortlessly and with such great skill. I want to teach like that, to do it so well and with so much skill. To reach that point, I must continually honestly examine what I do and who I am.

5. Responsibility of Self

Our society blames others for everything. It's always the other person's fault. I feel that we are responsible for our actions and we need to face up to them. By accepting personal responsibility, I can begin to see who I am. This is very hard to do because it's so out of step with what our society currently practices. But if I can be responsible for myself and my actions, I can determine who I am and how I will be.

The year I wrote these values, I found it was really important that I focus on me as much as the students. How interesting. They always have been called "My Values," but until this year, they were focused on the students. I found that I want the same thing for them as I want for myself. We've blended together somehow. My effort to read widely and struggle to write powerfully (my current issues) are reflected here. **As I continue to learn, I pull my students along with me. They become partners in my journey and I hope benefit from it.**

By forcing myself to write about my values, I am more aware and can better articulate my significant beliefs. But these are mine. As a community we need to work toward identifying final values that will reflect everyone in our learning community, so we need to gather information. In September, sometime during the second week of school, we have an evening when parents and children come to visit the school. During that evening, I ask parents and students to write on the following scene: Project six years ahead. Imagine your son or daughter (or in the case of the

student, yourself) walking across the stage picking up his or her (your) high-school diploma. How do you want your child to be? Not *what* do you want him or her to be, but *how?* Parents and students write for about ten minutes. *This exercise always frightens me. What if they value something that I don't? What if they want their child to get in the 99th percentile on the standardized test? What if they want their child to answer all the basal reader questions correctly? Once I know what they value, then I have to deal with it.*

Ben's mother wrote:

> I'm so happy and proud of Ben. He's not a 4.0 (A) student, but he's confident and able to face whatever challenges lay ahead. I know that whatever road he chooses to take or whatever direction in life, he will be just fine.

Kate's father recorded:

> I want Kate to step into a world she can examine, understand, and respond to responsively. She will smile with confidence and self-assurance.

Parent views are the same basic values I wanted for my two sons. We all want our children to be successful. The dialogue here needs go the other way as well. I ask for their opinion, but they don't get to hear mine. I need to create a way for them to hear what I value.

The next day, the students and I read all the writings and create a giant list of the traits listed. *Interestingly, I don't share my values. We only look at parent and student writing. Why am I the silent partner in all this? Am I concerned with the issue of power?* **By keeping my values to myself, I'm controlling and maintaining a traditional power position. As much as I verbally express my desire to have an open community, I'm the reluctant participant.** As we closely examine the lists for patterns, we discover they fall into two categories: Academic and Social. I find these same two categories occurring each year.

After examining the list, Daniel said, "I thought my parents wanted me to get good grades. Here they want me to be nice." The list always surprises the students, since the social list is so much longer. This leads us to the discussion of whether it's

better to be a "good student" or a "student who gets good grades." We never can agree, so I suggest we find out what our community thinks. Together we brainstorm a list of the members of our community as parents, teachers, friends in other classes, and each other, and set out to find what they think. That evening students go home and interview their parents on the subject. We share all the gathered data the following day. Kate reported the results of her interview to the class:

He (my dad) would rather me be a good student. Good grades don't really matter if you learned the lesson. A good student is someone willing and able to learn a lesson.

Sean read his parent interview:

Me: Would you rather me be a good student or for me to get good grades?

Mom & Dad: I would rather you be a good student because it teaches you to get along with people. If you have those qualities you will be a success in life. If you don't have the social qualities from being a good student then people in the future might not like your attitude. Even if you get good grades and qualify for some jobs you might not get the job because of your attitude.

Isaac, however, shared a different opinion:

Isaac needs to get good grades so that he can be smart and know how to add, read, and write correctly. Good behavior is not a problem. Right now if he gets good grades, he would be able to get into any college of his choice and be able to find a good job when he gets grown so that he can support himself.

Letters like the one from Isaac's parents always disturb me since they don't agree with my views. I have to be sensitive to the fact that they do believe what they've written. I have to watch out and make sure that Isaac isn't put in a position of having to defend his parents. I'll need to monitor the discussion closely. I've never fully resolved my personal tension here and I never explored the feelings of the family after our class values are determined. Maybe I don't want to know.

The letters add more information to our data collection. Generally the students are surprised that parents want them to be good students, since most parents talk so

much about working hard to get good grades. *These discussions are really important. Through all the give and take of ideas, we're discovering who we are individually and collectively.* **We're building a common understanding of who we are that will enable us to work together for the rest of the year. We are learning to honor and respect all our voices within this discussion.**

After parents, we interview the teachers in the building. We brainstorm a long list of questions and then narrow it down to four. Last year the questions were:

1. Do you want a student to be a good student or a student who gets good grades?
2. What do you look for in a good student? What are his or her qualities?
3. How many hours would you prefer a student to study and why?
4. Were you a good student? If so, how?

The students break up into teams and interview the teachers during their lunch breaks. *This is a safe way for students to begin to venture outside their usual circle. I've prepped the teachers, so they know what to expect and can gently help any student who may be nervous. The treat of cheesecake in the lounge last Friday made everyone feel guilty enough to agree to be interviewed. Food always works!*

Looking at all the gathered data, we discover that the majority of all the interviewed groups favored the idea of being a good student over being a student who gets good grades. I pose the question, "But what does being a good student mean?" Before we can even begin this discussion, Mark shouts out, "Let's interview!" *He's got it! Now let's see how they go about organizing themselves to gather the data.* Rachel lists all the teachers on the board and TELLS everyone to sign up for one teacher to interview. We're going to have to work on Rachel's leadership skills here. The class willingly agrees and Alyssa reminds people to write in their homework assignment book to interview their parents. *All right, group! We're on our way. Alyssa's reminder about the homework tells me she is feeling some responsibility for group success. Rachel just wants to be in charge.* So we interview and again create lists of data.

Last year we spent two days examining all the data and looking for patterns. I share Ruth Hubbard and Brenda Power's (1993) book on teacher research to give them an idea on how to analyze the data. We narrowed it down to three concepts: effort, responsibility, and respect. We all agreed that these three were essential

character traits for being a good student. *These are nice terms, but they're too big. They mean different things to each of us. Oh, no, more discussion! We're going to use up all our words before the first month of school is over.* So we begin defining our three values. Concept circles, from the Equals Math program, gives us a structure and a way to process our thinking. At the end of the day, we have our values clearly defined based on all the information we've collected. We're done, after nearly two weeks of interviews and talking. The room is a disaster. Butcher paper charts are everywhere. But now we have our road map. The wonderful thing about this process is that we end up with clear expectations for everyone—students, parents, and me; our entire community. There is no hidden agenda. I'm no longer in *the* judgment position; we can assess ourselves. We are now tied together by talk, and talk isn't undone easily. We have a vocabulary to use that describes our values. I love this process because I truly don't know the outcome. It allows me to work as a research partner with them. **In writing about the process, I'm struck at how risky this enterprise is, and I have to be willing to live with the results.**

Throughout the dialogue process, the students and I are learning how to conduct conversations with each other. We're learning how to listen to others, how to modify our own thinking, and how to examine where compromise can be made. We are creating common understandings and meanings unique to us (Watson, 1993). This process is much more important than I thought. I now understand the significance of our dialogue; we are creating a living community through our words.

The completed attribute circles are enlarged and go up on the classroom wall as a visual reminder to us all. Copies of the attribute circles go home for the parents to see and stick on the refrigerator door as a reference. The students and I will refer to them often as a way of self-assessment. Now, when the parents, students, and I talk, we have a common understanding of the important values within the room.

Group Identification

One of the lessons I learned from Eric and The Dancers, a story I shared with you at the beginning of this chapter was the importance of feeling valued. I sought ways in which the students in my classroom and I could somehow have a feeling of unity. The dance incident pointed out the influence of a public audience. Bolman & Deal note that a rich symbolic life is important to the development of a community which proved true with Eric and class who after the dance saw themselves as

performers. So by combining the idea of symbols, public display, my value of unity, and I intuit that we needed a visual sign of our community, I created the motto and logo project.

It begins in September. After a discussion of the purposes of mottoes and logos, the students set about creating a motto and a logo for our class. We spend several days brainstorming and listing. We usually end up combining several until we all agree on the final version. Last year, we were the Austin A's. In previous years, the classes were The Raiders of Knowledge and The Students of the Midnight Sun. Using money from a bake sale, we buy school sweatshirts for each member of the classroom. We paint the motto and logo on the back of each. We traditionally wear them on Fridays and special occasions, such as field trips, and as costumes in public performances. Besides providing another opportunity for consensus, this activity creates a real sense of identity. **I hadn't realized that this activity has so many layers. Not only do the students practice consensus building, but they have to find positive attributes about the class as a whole. They also have to work together to raise the money for the sweatshirts. There's probably as much consensus building in deciding on the baked good prices as there is in agreeing on a motto and logo. And in the end, it blends all my purposes together with a positive result.**

Problem Solving

Another way that we practice consensus building is by solving problems together. Problematic issues are brought up in our morning meeting time. As the students feel more comfortable, they bring up issues of concern. We learn to listen with our hearts as well as our ears (Peterson, 1992) as we attempt to solve the dilemmas that occur in our community.

Last October, Jessica presented a problem with the use of the pillows in the reading area.

Terri: OK, what would you like to talk about this morning?

Jessica : I have a concern. It's about the pillows. The same people get the pillows every day. The rest of us never get a chance. It's not fair.

Jon: Yeah, I sit next to the window and I never get to use them.

Terri: Is this a concern for the rest of you?

Class: (All nod.)

Terri: What do you want to do? How do you want to solve it?

Jessica: I've thought about it. I think that if you've used the pillow once, then you shouldn't use it other times during the day.

Tray: But if I get there first, I should get to use it. It's not my fault you don't pick it up.

Chris: But I sit clear over there. I never can use a pillow. I don't get there in time.

Jacqueline: We could make a chart. Then when you use the pillow cross off your name.

Sarah: Yeah, then you can't use a pillow until all the names have been crossed off.

Brent: That's kinda silly. Just to use the pillows.

Sarah: Do you have a better idea?

Brent: We should just handle it ourselves. We can monitor it. Be responsible. If you've used the pillow once, make sure others use it, too.

Kevin: I would rather do that than have a chart.

Class: (Lots of nods.)

Terri: Okay, what do you want to do?

Jessica: Okay, let's try it without a chart until Friday. Then let's talk about how it's working.

Terri: Okay with everybody?

Class: (Agrees.)

The class agreed to try it for a week and revisit the issue on the following Friday. On this particular issue, they were unable to monitor themselves. *I wonder how they are going to handle this? There seems to be a small number of students who monopolize the pillows and are unwilling to share.* The complaints continued. At Sarah's suggestion, they tried a chart. That didn't work either, as some of the students misused the chart by not crossing off their names. *It never occurred to me that the students wouldn't follow the chart. I'm disappointed, but I learned something significant about these particular students.* Complaints continued, and finally the class agreed that if we each couldn't use the pillows fairly, no one should use them. So I put them away. *Not all problems have an immediate solution. We probably could have worked through the problem eventually, but frankly, I got tired of hearing the complaints about the pillows. We'll revisit the problem again later, allowing us to gain a fresh perspective.*

Two months later at a class meeting, Jacqueline brought up the issue of the pillows again. The class quickly decided that pillows should be used but only if we had a plan in place. Jacqueline proposed that since each student had a specific day to

turn in their writing notebooks, we could use that same schedule for pillow usage. So if Jennifer turned in her writing notebook on Mondays, she could use a pillow on Monday. Everyone agreed and the plan was a success. *It's interesting to me that now everyone followed this particular suggestion. Was it the timing, the fact that it was later in the year? Was it because the pillows were put away for awhile? Were the students more able to accept or follow a solution? Was it such an emotional issue before, and the lapse of time allowed everyone to rethink? Was this class unwilling to think in terms of the "good of the community" earlier, but now it could? I don't know, but I'm glad that we were able to solve the issue before the school year ended.* Sometimes issues and actions remain a mystery to me. I can observe, think, question, and reflect, but there are times when I just don't know.

Barnes (1992) points out that most learning depends upon the active participation of the learner with their own learning. In that sense, the students are taking control of their learning by problem solving. I, on the other hand, have yet to totally accept this. At times, I still rush in and "solve" the problem because of the time element or my patience level. Intellectually, I also know this is not good practice and hinders the development of the community (Schmuck & Schmuck, 1992). My learning continues as I reflect on those moments when I interrupt the learning cycle of the students.

Siqoq: Facing Challenges

There are times in the north when the creamy sky and the earthly snow are blended together, creating *siqoq.* A strong updraft of wind will pick up snow crystals and swirl them around, forming a whiteout condition and creating dangerous situations for the traveler. All vantage points, landmarks, and directions are obscured. Likewise in the classroom, there are times when I can't find my path as everything swirls around me. *It's my biggest fear—losing my way, not knowing what to do next, having a picture in my mind of where I want to go next but not knowing how to get there, and not knowing how to solve a problem.* **But if I stand still and allow the swirling snow to settle, I can usually find my location and from there my possible destination. It's important to stop and take a breath in the midst of being lost, to not panic and run wildly in circles.** These situations are my challenges while creating a community within the classroom. There are challenges in being together, coming together, and working together. Sometimes I purposely set the challenges to push the class closer to establishing a community, but sometimes the challenges just happen within the normal part of being together.

Being Together

One of the first challenges I set upon the class is learning to be together. Since we are going to be working together for the next nine months, it's essential that we know each other closely. To begin this process, I take all my students for an overnight experience to my home. There are several purposes for this activity. The first is the opportunity to get to know each other in an intense but short time period. For two days and one night, the students and I are together constantly. Through hiking, roasting hot dogs, singing songs, preparing breakfast, telling stories, and reading to each other, we begin to see individuals with distinct personalities. I watch the students carefully, determining who might need more help in being a member of the group, who emerges as leaders, and who easily moves from group to group. These observations will aid me in building a strong community when we return to the classroom. I'll be able to use this knowledge as I begin to pair up students in cooperative activities.

The second reason for the trip is to move away from the school setting so that we can see each other without the imposed barriers of school. My students live in a small community, where reputations are earned over minor incidents and are then carried from student to student. When they come to my home, the students have the opportunity to shed those reputations. I've discovered that students are quite different when away from the institution of school. As a class, we discover that John can efficiently build a fire for the dinner or that Sheila can hike all day and still tell jokes. All students have the opportunity to share their true selves during this time. *I know that I'm different. I'm more relaxed. I don't worry about time—bells, clocks, or schedules. During those two days, I'm free to modify the plan to fit our needs. I laugh more and smile more. The constraints of school are gone.* **I'm free to focus on knowing the students rather than teaching them. The knowing will facilitate the teaching later. I want to model this type of interaction so that the students can begin to focus on each person and not the reputations.**

The third reason is to begin to create memorable moments in our history that will bind us together as a group. This trip begins our life together. What we do together in the two days will be told and retold in our classroom during lunch times and to new students. We are creating our identity (Peterson, 1992). **Like the epic tales of old, our experiences will be the stories that are embellished and become class sagas to be enjoyed each time in the retelling.**

The final reason is to allow my students to see where I live and that I'm a person with a kitchen, weeds in the garden, and books everywhere. I want them to see me as an individual and not just a "teacher." This trip is also a courtesy. I visited them in their home and so they should have the opportunity to visit mine. **When they come, I am inviting them to share my life outside of school. I'm modeling trust. I'm trusting them with a view into my personal life. I want them to honor my life outside of school as well as inside the school, just as I will honor their activities and life away from school.**

Coming Together

As the awareness grows of being together, I creatively structure challenges for the class which, I hope, will draw us closer as a community. Palmer (1993) claims:

> The bond of listening holds the cosmic community together—careful, vulnerable listening for how things look from this standpoint and that and that, a listening that allows us not only to know the other but to be known from the other's point of view. (p. 67)

> The challenges of being together require us to not only know each other well but to allow others to know us and this, I believe, is acquired through the act of attentive listening. It's the three tasks working simultaneously that is important. The students and I must be willing to share ourselves as well as listen to others and welcome them into our life. It's like the continuous flow of an electrical current. If everything is working, we have light; if not, nothing happens.

Coming together fosters these three actions through several ideas. The first is the act of communication. So far, I've done most of the communicating, and now it's time for the students to learn to talk honestly and openly with each other as well as listen in the same manner. Another aspect of coming together is learning to put aside personal desires for the good of the order. I initiate this idea by playing cooperative games and then helping them transfer that awareness to classroom life. The final aspect of coming together is the sharing of power and knowledge. To establish an open learning community, I need to re-examine my traditional role as teacher, I need to understand my values as well as the community values, and the students and I need to become a united learning family. I begin first with providing a structure for our

daily class meetings. **There's an interesting tension within me at this point. I work to acknowledge the students as individuals and value them as such, yet at the same time, I'm asking them to unite with a group of peers and sometimes forfeit their individual desires for the good of the community. Is it possible to do this without losing the individuality of each student? Csikszentmihalyi (1990) suggests it is possible, but difficult. I totally agree.**

Open Talk

Class Meetings

During my second year of teaching, I was talking to a neighbor who was a kindergarten teacher. She was telling me that her students wanted to talk to her all of the time and the only way that she could balance the need for individual talk and the academic tasks was to set aside time just for casual conversation. She called it circle sharing. When a child would come up to her and want to tell her about his new dog, she would say, "That's great, but save it for circle sharing and then we can all hear about it." I was struggling with the same dilemma. I wanted to encourage this type of verbal interaction, too, but couldn't see how it would fit into the busy day. So I borrowed her idea, adapted it to create sixth graders and created class meetings. I've found the daily meeting is absolutely essential in the creation of our community. Our conversations within the setting of the meeting serve three purposes in building and maintaining community. First it binds us together. As we share personal observations and comments, we learn about each other and grow comfortable together. Second, as we gain courage to present concerns and then work together to solve problems, we grow as a community. And third, I gain insights into the continuing development of the class community. **Even though we are all separate and individual, we are all also interconnected.** Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) idea is at work as the concept of class meetings honors both of those roles.

After we begin the day sharing a story and singing several songs together, the students and I gather in a circle on the floor, and have "meeting." The rules for our meeting are simple; everyone must be visible, students don't have to raise hands, we don't interrupt anyone, and we accept all ideas. During our daily meetings, the students can raise any issue, share any concern, offer possible solutions. *I love our meeting times. It allows me to be a member of the group. I can participate or just listen. I learn about whole class concerns and about individual students. Now that we*

do this every day, I couldn't possibly start the day without our introduction time together. It's a gentle way of beginning our day.

Since this is a new concept for many students, the first meetings deal with very specific issues. At those first introductory meetings of the year, I begin with praise for something that is going well. This could be anything from arriving on time, pushing chairs in after leaving, or helping each other while doing classroom jobs. Then, I bring up a specific problem that I am struggling with, such as too much noise and confusion at the beginning of the day. Together we try to solve the problem. During the discussion all suggestions are given equal listening time. Through my action of attentive listening and acceptance of all ideas, I model values of respect and compassion. After ideas are shared, then as a group we formulate a plan. We'll try out the suggestion, and often we'll bring the issue back to a meeting and discuss how it is working. **I now realize this is an action research approach based on my values of respect and compassion. This model continues to be enacted throughout the classroom in all manner of ways and this surprises me.** Students begin to realize that I'm not the person who solves everything. By allowing students to wrestle with solutions, I model that we all are in this together, and as a family, we need to deal with and arrive at solutions together.

Last September, one of the issues that I brought up was the problem of students not doing homework. An unusually high number of students were not completing the work. The students freely brainstormed solutions, but they were all things I would do. For example, I would keep them after school, I would call parents, I would keep them in during lunch to complete work. I pointed out that this was class family problem and I would not be the sole person to assume the entire responsibility. After a long thinking time, they began to brainstorm ideas that the entire class could do. They finally agreed to take five minutes before class ended to check homework lists with peers in small groups. We tried this for a week, and discussed it at our next meeting. As a group we decided that it helped everyone and we would continue the practice.

I find the action of this group typical for early in the school year. The students looked to me to solve the problem because that is the way it has usually worked. They freely offered suggestions, but I was to carry them out. I want the students to see that as a family group, they have the capability and the responsibility to arrive at possible solutions, carry them out, assess, and then make necessary adjustments.

At a meeting several weeks later, I'm still acting as moderator, but the students begin to take control:

Terri: I just have a couple of announcements for today. Coach Leary wants you to bring your coats to gym. You'll be going outside. Tomorrow is the last day for any book orders. Don't forget that we're cooking on Thursday, so bring in your ingredients for the bread. *Soon, I want the students to do these kinds of announcements. They will be able to remind each other of upcoming events. Wonderful, Brad has something to say but didn't interrupt.*

Brad: I have my flour today. Where do you want me to put it?

Terri: I don't know. Where should we keep everything? *It would be really easy for me to answer this, but let's see if they can work out a solution.*

John: He could keep it in his cubby.

Monique: It might get wet from his tennis shoes. How about by the sink area?

Beth: That's good. We could move the scales to the side and then stack everything by the pencil sharpener.

Terri: *Terrific. They solved this first problem easily. They heard a couple of possible solutions; now let's decide. I'll model how to bring it to a close so they know what to do when they reach this point next time.* OK, we have a couple of solutions. Let's decide on one. Which one do you think would best solve the storage problem?

Class: (All talk at once.)

Terri: OOPS . . . one at a time. *They forgot about taking turns. They'll get better at this as they have more practice.*

Josh: The sink.

Terri: Why? *I want them to give reasons for their decisions, not just agree with their friends.*

Josh: I think the sink would be best 'cause there's more room and it's out of the way.

Lisa: I agree. I don't have room in my cubby for anything else.

Terri: *That's better.*

April: If my oil leaked out it would get all over my tennis shoes. I think the sink area would be better.

Terri: OK, I'm hearing that most of you think the sink area would be better. Is that agreeable with everyone? *Asking everyone is important. I want the students to see that each person's opinion is important.*

Class: (All nod.)

Terri: OK, let's put all our stuff over there. Let's just stack everything neatly. It's time for reading; let's begin.

Schmuck and Schmuck (1992) point out that groups usually go through stages of development beginning with being able to define the task and set the limits. It's only in the later stages that the members of the community can find a solution through the open exchange of ideas. I find that those stages are either expanded or diminished depending on how attentive I am to the community as a whole and how I respond to my observations and intuition.

During our meeting times, I continually assess the community development. I listen for positive comments of others. Are the students supportive of each other and willing to give others credit, or do they only talk about themselves and their achievements? I'm attuned to statements about the class as a whole. My ears pick up when I hear collective pronouns such as "we" and "our" being used rather than "I" or "me." I'm very conscious of the turn-taking abilities of each student and the class as a whole. If the students do begin to talk all at once, do they notice who talks next or do they plunge on without regard to the other student? All these things tell me where we are in the formation of our community.

The following is an example of my observation and mental response to students in a class meeting. In this particular class, we were having difficulties in positively communicating with each other, and I thought a discussion about our meeting times would be a way to approach the problem.

Terri: Let's talk about our meetings.

Jessica: I have a question about meeting. Can we like start bringing our metacognition journal and writing down notes about it so we remember about it or something?

Terri: If you want to. It's fine with me? *Jessica usually doesn't start the meetings. She must have something important to say. That's an interesting idea. Maybe we should keep a record of our decisions at meetings. It could be a spiral notebook and maybe each family group could take turns recording. I'll bring this up tomorrow. This would be a nice ritual to begin our meetings and also review our discussion from yesterday. The writings would be a way to tie us together.*

Dustin: I think the reason we have meetings is that we give out ideas, like our creating a post office for the school.

Terri: *Great, Dustin jumped right in there with his idea. There were no snickers at him this time. All are listening.*

Kevin: Like he said, we have meetings to do special stuff. We also do it to share about what we did. Like what we did yesterday, we made $80.10 from the bake sale. That's a lot of money.

Terri: *At last, someone continued the conversation from the person before. This is a first time for this group. Yea!!! I'm glad he mentioned that; this group needs to see themselves in a positive light. Meetings also let us celebrate together.*

Amanda: I think that when we do things, like when we made our pillows, I think we should sit in meeting to do stuff like that.

Terri: Yeah, that was interesting yesterday. *Amanda is always full of suggestions but not listened to very much. I wonder if the others will pick up on her comment. It was fun yesterday. We all sat on the floor and stuffed our chair pillows. I heard nice kind talk among the students, and I also heard people talking to many different people, not just their close friends.*

Amanda: I think that when we start working on our post office, we should sit in meeting because it's harder to sit at your desk. It would be easier if we were all sitting together.

Terri: *Watch it Amanda. Let others talk, don't monopolize.* Do you know that we have a different kind of talking when we have meeting than when we sit at our desks? *Let's see how they handle this idea.*

Jessica: We can talk without raising our hand.

Amanda: We express ourselves more than sitting at our desk.

Terri: What do you mean? *Come on, Amanda. Let others talk. I can tell from the expressions of the others that they feel the same.*

Sarah: At meeting we don't have many rules. We don't have to raise our hands. It's easier to pay attention.

Terri: *Good, Sarah jumped in and verified Amanda's comments. It will be listened to because Sarah did this.*

Amanda: I think we pay more attention when we're at meeting than when we're at our desk because we know we can say almost anything we want to.

Terri: *OK, I need to work with Amanda. I think I'll sit in and take notes during her small group math meeting. Then during lunch I'll share with her my findings. I don't think she's aware of what she's doing.*

Sarah: At meeting we can see everybody, and at our desk there are people behind us that can only see our head.

Terri: So what I'm hearing is that it's easier to talk when we're in meeting and can see everyone.

All: Yes

Terri: *This group has had a real problem in talking honestly with each other. Maybe a daily meeting would help to solve this problem.* I'm thinking that maybe we need to have a quick meeting after our singing every single day to see where we are, maybe talk about any problems that you and I might have, make plans for the day and such. What do you think? *This will shorten our reading and writing time, but I think the trade-off will be worth it.*

All: Yes, we should.

Along with assessing the progress of community, the class meeting is where I focus on changing my role. If we are striving to form a community, I need to shed some of my authoritarian stance and be willing to become a member of a working community. Shaffer and Anundsen (1993) state:

> Balancing task and relationship, authority and freedom and the needs of the individual with those of the group prove to be the primary challenges of the workplace community. (p. 122)

Balancing is the issue for me. I do want the students and I to talk and share, identify problems, and form solutions. It's just so easy and takes less time when I become a "traditional" teacher, give my opinion or share my knowledge, and be in charge. *The whole idea of sharing power is like balancing on a tightrope. If I lean too far in any direction, I fall off. I've fallen off so many times as I struggle to learn the art of sharing power. The embarrassing part is that I can see myself getting into hazardous positions, but I can't pull myself out in time to save myself (or the students). I just plunge ahead and regret it afterwards.*

During times of stress or because of time, I often revert to my traditional role of authority. One year we had a dog as a permanent resident in the classroom. The students were responsible for his feeding, walking, and grooming. After he had been in the classroom for only a week, Fatima called a class meeting. She wanted to know why only Nicole was allowed to walk Pepper. She felt that everyone should share the privilege. In the excitement of having Pepper in the building, I reverted to my traditional role of authority. I had Nichole walk Pepper because she had eleven dogs of her own, and I felt that she was confident enough to make Pepper behave. After I realized what I had done and explained this to the students, the students decided that Nichole would train one student a day. After a month, everyone would know the routine and could do it on their own. They set up their own schedule and followed it carefully. Everyone shared in the responsibility of caring for Pepper, and I realized that our community was stronger when I shared decision making. **Jumping in and making ultimate decisions is a natural part of teaching. This was what I was taught in my educational program. Changing my actions is extremely difficult and requires me to consciously work at it. It doesn't come naturally or easily.**

Cooperation

After working with several classes, I created a cooperative plan which, I believe, enables students to become part of a cohesive classroom community. It's based on my individual compassion for each student, my value of community, my understanding of this age group, and my knowledge of group process.

Not all my students arrive in my classroom eager and willing to work with everyone in the classroom. At the sixth grade level, they have already determined who they will let in their group and who they will not. For me, a major part of creating a cohesive community is breaking down these barriers. The students need to see the benefits of being a team or family. Cooperative learning is a way to achieve this.

I adopted the "sink or swim together" notion from Johnson, et al., 1986. This is the idea that we all work together to succeed and everyone's efforts are needed for this to happen. This is new for most of the students who enter the room in the fall, since the majority of the students come from rather traditional classrooms where individual achievement is highly stressed. The best way I've found to help them learn to work with each other is to lead the class through carefully constructed cooperative activities that teach cooperative thinking and actions.

During the first week or so of school, I discreetly observe students in all types of situations. I visit gym class and wander the playground. I watch for those students who hang back or are not easily assimilated into the group activity. Eric, mentioned in the dance situation at the beginning of this text, was one such student. On the first day of school he colored his name card solid black, he ate by himself, and he stood at the edge of the football game. He became my benchmark student for that year. I created the idea of benchmark students to determine how long I stay at each stage of the cooperative process. When they are easily involved in each activity, I then move the class on to the next step. My usual cooperative process begins with whole group work, moves into partner work, and then partner work moves into small group (groups of four) work. Once we've reached the small group stage, the class easily moves in and out of all three stages for different types of learning activities, however, this can vary based on the needs of the individual group.

In the first few weeks of school, the class and I spend time playing cooperative games that require all of us to work together. *I love doing this, but it is not warmly received among my building colleagues. They see it as playing and often ask me when I plan to start really teaching. What they don't see is that because of these games, we will have an easier time of learning for the rest of the year.* Sometimes we take a walk to the park to play the outside games. I get fewer questions that way. The games reinforce the "identify the problem, offer solutions, try it out" cycle that is also happening during the meeting times. This also gives us a chance to get to know one another in a nonthreatening situation, and since the games are nonacademic and nonathletic, it puts everyone on an equal basis. I want students to talk to each other; I

want students to begin to use each other as resources to solve problems: I want us to laugh together. I find playing these games does it.

In this example of a cooperative game, I'm demonstrating to you my internal thinking based on my observations, past experience and intuition.

The purpose is for everyone to use their block to build *one* structure that must be at least four blocks high. The students walk in a circle, holding their block until I stop the music. They must construct a building, using every block, by the time I count to fifteen. *Okay, this is where we see what the group is really like. How will they handle the pressure of me counting and the need to use every block? Who will compromise? Who will dominate? How will they eventually solve the problem?* I start the music and they begin to walk. They watch me to see if they can get a clue as to when I'll stop the song. As I turn off the tape recorder,

Terri: One, two, three . . . .
Hmmm, lots of pushing and shoving. Most of the girls standing back, letting the boys take over.

Terri: Fourteen, fifteen. Stand back, let's see. Sorry, it's not four blocks high and there are some blocks not used. Let's try it again.

Mark: It can't be done. You count too fast.

They reassemble in the circle with their blocks.

Terri: *I love their faces. They can't believe we're going to do it again. Mark has already given up. He doesn't know we'll keep at this until we finally succeed. No one yet talking to each other on possible solutions. Let's see what happens now.*
Remember to keep walking.

The music begins again. Shuffling feet and eyes intently on my finger, resting on the off button.

Terri: One, two, three, four. . .

Steve: Here, put your block here.

Jennifer: Move out of the way. I need to put my block down.

Frank: You're standing on my thumb!

Terri: *There's definitely more talking now. That's good. I was afraid we would have a very silent year. Jennifer is attempting to*

organize the blocks after they're put down. Mark is pushing his way through the crowd to place his block. Jessica is standing outside the group just waiting.

Thirteen, fourteen, fifteen. Okay how did we do? Let's stand back and see. Hmmm, closer, don't you think? It's four blocks high, but there still are some blocks not used. Let's try it again!

Mark: Again, this is impossible.

Jennifer: No it's not. We just can't push.

Terri: *Yea! Jennifer. Keep going. Give some direction here.*

Jennifer: If we all take turns we can do it.

Mark: What if three people go in first, then everyone hand their blocks to them. Then it wouldn't be so crowded.

Terri: *Good idea, Mark. Think I'll count a little slower this time to let success be a little closer.*

Ready? All right, here we go. (Music plays, stops.) One . . . two . . .

Mark: (dashes in) Hand the blocks to me!

Sean: (dashes in) Hand the blocks to ME!

Jennifer: (also dashes in) No, hand the blocks to me!

Frank and Chuck also rush to the center.

Frank: I'll take the blocks!

Chuck: No, give them to me!

Terri: *This is interesting. Wonder how they will work this one out? Jennifer is the only girl; the rest are waiting on the edge. No one gave blocks to Sean. Several people walked around the circle to hand the block to Frank or Chuck rather than give it to Sean. Need to watch the interaction with Sean.*

Fourteen, fifteen. Okay, how did we do? Some blocks still aren't being used. Let's try it again. I have to rewind the tape, so you can rest a minute. *They need a couple of minutes to talk about this and see if they can work it out.*

Jennifer: Giving blocks to certain people didn't work ëcause . . .

Frank: We all rushed in. There were too many people in the middle.

Sean: You need to give the blocks to me.

Mark: I'll go in, and Chuck and Frank. No one else go in. Okay?

(all nod)

Chuck: And give your block to the nearest person. Don't walk around with it.

Terri: *I note a bit of frustration in faces and voices. Let's hope we get it together this time. I'll watch my counting in relationship to the blocks being used. Wonder how Sean will react to not being a block person?*
Okay? Tape is ready to go. Let's see what we do this time. (Music begins and quickly ends.) One, two, three . . .

Chuck, Frank, and Mark rush to the center. The group closes in as they hand over their blocks.

Terri: *Sean is staying to the outside, still holding his block. Is this his way of getting back at the group? Count a little slower. Good, Jennifer took his block and passed it forward. He doesn't need to be seen as the reason the group didn't succeed.*
Fourteen, fifteen.

They yell in celebration as they back away.

Mark: We did it! All the blocks are used and it's four stories high.

Terri: Good for you. You figured this out so much faster than other classes. Even some of my adult college classes took many more times to build their tower. Let's sit on the floor and talk about this.
Let's see how they perceive the whole experience.
Well, what do you think?

Jennifer: It was hard at first.

(long silence)

Terri: *They aren't sure yet what the rules are here.*

Why did you say that, Jennifer?

Jennifer: Well, when we all rushed in there wasn't room to put all the blocks.

Frank: Yeah, somebody stepped on my thumb.

Terri: *Okay somebody needs to jump in here. They need to figure out that I'm not going to direct everything.*

Mark: It worked better when we figured out a plan.

Chuck: Yeah, when we passed blocks to only three people.

Jennifer: Not everybody followed the rules about passing their block. (She stares at Sean.)

Terri: *Oops, need to redirect here. Now is not the time to confront the Sean situation. He needs more time and opportunities to be part of the group.*

Let's think about how we made a plan.

Mark: Well first, Jennifer, I think, suggested that only three people go in the center. It didn't work that time ëcause too many of us went in. Then I said that Chuck, Frank, and I should be the only people in the center. That worked.

Terri: *Great, Mark gave credit to Jennifer.* That was the plan. But how did we make the plan?

Jennifer: By talking. Talking together and working together.

Terri: Do you think that talking with each other helped?

Frank: Yeah, when we didn't have a plan it didn't work.

Terri: You guys were great. We need to applaud everyone for terrific cooperation. (Applause.) Now we need to head off to music.

As a result of this morning activity, I reexamine my afternoon. *The kids did a good job at solving the block problem. I can see they need more opportunities and time to talk with each other. The activities for this afternoon are okay, but I need to make sure Sean is not on the edge, but that he's physically in the middle. He's tall, so for Pass the Ball, we'll arrange the tallest people in the center and work outward. There's evidently some negative past history with the others. He'll be my benchmark person. I need to watch the interaction patterns, and as we go on, make sure that all have an opportunity to talk.* **This activity encompasses what appear to be foundational concepts of community: action research, power, dialogue, and**

purposeful action. I now see that the students go through an action research cycle within the block activity. I present the problem of block building. The students (eventually) come up with a plan. Then they test it out and analyze the results. Whether they modify their actions (talking to each other) will be determined with the afternoon activities. I use my power in a very delicate and compassionate way as I determine how fast to count or how much time to offer for discussion. I do want them to feel success. With the exception of Mark, all the students entered into this activity totally accepting the premise of the game. They acted in a purposeful way in finding a solution. With their dialogue and purposeful actions, they are constructing their own community. I set the stage, but they build. Finally, I changed my afternoon plans as a result of my observations of this activity for the purpose of helping Sean feel successful in a group activity. I believe this is an example of enacting on my values for the individual.

As we do many whole class activities, from making books to creating a class motto and logo, I observe the students, including the benchmark students, working together to solve problems. When there is an ease and openness in working with each other, I know we're ready to work with a partner. Partner work is a gentle beginning to small groups of four, the ultimate working unit in my classroom.

Partner Work

The partner activities are quick and short so the students have the opportunity to work with many different partners. Again, I want to break down barriers. I begin by structuring how partnerships are created. "Find a partner who is a different height." *Oops, Monique still doesn't have a partner. Better move. I'll grab her and move her out of the center of the room. Don't want her standing alone when all the partners are taken.* Josh, you're about Monique's height, would you be Monique's partner today? Thanks. *Wonder what's happening with Monique? She's usually outgoing and has no problem with this. I'll ask in her journal today.* Let's brainstorm as many games as you can think of that involve a ball. The one with the longest eyelashes will be the writer. I'll give them about a minute. Okay, please finish up our lists. Have one person hang on to it; we'll use it later today. Before we return to our seats, please write a positive note to your partner about working together with them. When you finish, please give it to your partner. *Great, almost everyone is writing. This will help them focus on the positive aspects of their partnership. Moses is looking around; he's not sure what to write. Josh and De are not doing much either.*

They are clearly uncomfortable. We'll take some time to do some talking as soon as we finish. One of the initial purposes of working with only a partner is to allow students to gain confidence in social skills. One way to structure the talk about the role and responsibilities of being a good partner is to make a T-chart. We create a T-chart that describes what a good partner looks and sounds like.

A Good Partner

Sounds Like	*Looks Like*
uses positive words	looks directly at you
ask questions if necessary	listens closely
asks, not tells	sits close
makes helpful suggestions	
uses low voice	

I'm surprised at the number of students who find this activity difficult. They truly aren't aware of their own actions and how they affect others. A real benefit to this activity is that it allows the student who has never been in a successful working partnership to have a grasp of what is needed. They don't realize that there are actual things that they can do to help make the partnership work and that it isn't a chance happening. By making the hidden visible, more students have the opportunity of success. **I can use my position in the classroom to make potentially difficult situations easier by focusing on the actions and the dialogue of the students.**

I follow a format similar to what we did with whole group work: working on nonacademic activities first, then as they become more comfortable we move cooperative activities into the academic subjects. *I want them to not feel the added pressure of school work on top of trying to figure out the dynamics of partner work. I want them to be really successful with academic partner work, so we'll need to take it a bit at a time.*

Small Group Work

Again when the benchmark student is successful with partner work and I get a sense of ease, we move into groups of four for cooperative activities. I prefer groups of four and only use groups of five when I have odd numbers. I've been unsuccessful with triads because I've found that usually a partnership develops, leaving one student on the outside. With groups of four, the group is small enough to make everyone

accountable and yet it is large enough to have a variety of student expertise and ideas. I again follow the same procedure of doing nonacademic activities first, then moving into the academic ones. The academic activities usually are based around projects incorporating all the subject areas of social studies, science, math, language, and art. Embedded within this is the continual reflection cycle. After most activities, the students write in their metacognition journal, examining their learning in both the social and the content areas. They use the class values as guides for their thinking. We often read these aloud so that others can gain insights from our thinking.

Cooperative learning strategies help build our community. Students begin to rely on each other and learn the value of working together. It creates a cohesive family atmosphere within the classroom where it is safe to try new ideas, attempt new tasks, and voice new thoughts. Students are supported as they stretch themselves within the learning environment (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1986).

Sharing Power

In the whiteout condition of *siqoq,* the occasions when I feel the most lost are the times when I realize I need to step out of my traditional role of teacher and enter the classroom community as a working member. For me, it is the hardest and yet the most necessary thing if my vision of a true community is to develop. It requires a great deal of trust and faith on my part. I have to trust that the students will accept me in that role, and I have to have faith that all will be fine.

Consistent with the other community-building elements, I plunge in the first day of school. Probably the most important feature of that first day is my movement into the class community. Moving from behind the big desk (Atwell, 1987), I have my own "school" desk placed among the students' desks with all my school supplies inside. After the initial beginning formalities and after we have begun on our first task of creating a personal name tag, I sit at my desk and go about the job of making a name tag myself. *It will be interesting to see how this class reacts to me sitting out there with them, at one of their desks, at their level. They are all busy at work; I'll slide quietly into my desk. Only a few stares. That's good. Now get busy and work. They need to see me hard at work, too. "Brian, can I please borrow a blue crayon. I can't find mine. Thanks." They can never say no to a teacher. That side heard me borrowing. Now to model what to do when I'm done. I'll go to the nearest bookshelf and get a book. No one has been out of their seat yet. Let's see what happens now. Good thing teachers can read and watch students at the same time. It should be a gift*

that comes with the diploma. Great! Three students are up getting books. Now if they find a book and begin to read, we're off to a great start. Hmmm, De is just looking around. Come on, kiddo, pick up on the cues. Good, good, good. He's got it. Open the book and read. Yea! Now we'll settle in and read for the next half hour. **I realize that my actions are a strong model for students (Schmuck & Schmuck, 1992). I can influence the community by being an appropriate functioning member.** *I think we'll continue to read until lunch. I don't think we'll stop and talk about what just happened—how they knew what to do. I think we need more chances to figure this out before we talk. Then there'll be more opportunities for more students to be successful. I'll do more silent modeling after lunch. Terrific group!* **I see that modeling is one of the most significant and influential acts I can do for my students. I must be as I want them to become.**

Another way of sharing power is to not let the students put me in the single position of holding power. One of the expectations of the class involves asking questions. Students need to "ask three, before me." This means they need to ask at least three people before they can ask me. In most cases, one of the three knows the answer. Also when students initially begin group work, they will often ask me what to do next or how to go about the procedure. My answer to them is, "I'm not in your group, but I have faith you can figure it out." "What do you think?" is another one of my responses. I find many students thoroughly programmed to rely solely on the teacher. This sounds heartless and totally opposite the values I'm sharing in this study, but as Ralph Peterson points out, "Authority in the learning community is directed toward liberation, empowerment, and supporting students in seeing and thinking for themselves" (121). I love my students enough to step back and watch student empowerment grow.

Choice is a huge part of relinquishing my power within the classroom. On a daily basis, the students make choices in reading books, writing topics, and art media. I trust them to make meaningful choices. Projects involve the student deciding on a specific topic, where to gather information, and how to share the new information. It has not been easy allowing these choices. Each year I struggle with the comic book issue. *Is it really reading? What if students choose to read them all the time? Are they learning anything?* I've solved the dilemma by going to the students. In a class meeting we talk about the issue. In the past three years when I've done this, we reach a compromise. The students agree to monitor their choice of reading material, and I will learn to be tolerant if comics are read occasionally as long as the students also

read other types of text. *I've learned that it's always best to take issues like this to the class meeting. When students hear my concerns and I hear their reasoning, we always seem to create a reasonable compromise for everyone. It doesn't work when I dictate.*

Assessment is major area in which I've changed my role. I created student-led conferences as a result of seeing students negated in the assessment process. They virtually had no voice in any step of the traditional reporting. Now at the end of each quarter, my students prepare a portfolio of work that best represents them as a learner. Each piece is self selected. The student and I review the portfolio and complete the report card together. On one evening, all the students and their families come for our conference night. The student leads their own conference, showing their work and answering parent questions (Austin, 1994). This takes the place of the traditional parent-teacher conference. This requires a great deal of faith on my part, and the first time I did it, I was quite apprehensive. I've found that the students rise to the occasion and conduct a better conference than I ever could. **Student-led conferences have proven to be one of my best practices in sharing power and it's been a test of real faith. I've learned to truly trust each student to honestly share strengths and areas to improve.**

Working Together

Another created challenge is what I call a "magic moment." Magic moments are a result of the experience with the professional dance troupe that I shared earlier in this text. I realized that I could create situations where all of us in the class had to work together to succeed. Before I can structure a task to complete, I first have to know the strengths and weaknesses of the class. I also want to provide a challenging task, but not one that will intimidate or be unsuccessful. Moorman and Dishon (1983) point out that the more difficult the goal, the stronger the unity will be within the group once the goal is achieved. For some classes, it's easy to identify a strength that lends itself to a magic moment.

Several years ago, I had a class that was quite talented. Many took dancing lessons or were active in the school choir. Since we sing each morning to begin our day, I thought we could share some of those songs along with some poetry for a public production. That simple idea of poetry and songs grew into an hour-and-a-half evening for their parents and the community. It was a demanding yet fulfilling effort in which all of us supported each other (Roffey, Tarrant, & Majors 1994).

Then there are some classes where I struggle to find something that will pull us together. I remember one class where working together as a community was really difficult. I tried everything I knew to do the first two weeks of school. They argued and disagreed the entire two-day camping trip to my house, and this attitude continued in the classroom for weeks.

On October 7, I wrote in my journal:

> This journal is begun with the hopes that by requiring myself to write and reflect on the day, I will begin to sort out the chaos in my sixth-grade classroom. I've never had a class that befuddled me so. I feel frustration and anger. I don't understand why they are so mean to each other. The kids will do anything to be first and to have things their way. They challenge me on everything. They are a bright class and I thought maybe I was going too slow. But when I speed up, they can't handle directions or group work. They can't handle disruptions well. They require a set routine.
>
> I feel like we're treading peanut butter. I talked to Donna (my principal) on Friday. She gave me a pat on the back and said to stick with the cooperative skills. "They're more important than fractions." My comment: "I'm a teacher at risk."

On November 2, I was still concerned with their lack of cooperation:

> Nina (the counselor) came in today to discuss the issue of picking on people. She handled it well. The kids know what to do. They just don't do it. They say the right thing. They talked about not being kind to each other. Caryn said, "We needed to lower our proud level to get along."

On November 13, I wrote:

> Class dilemmas weigh on me. I think about them all the time, trying to find the answers.

My concern continued into December:

December 5
There is no laughter in Mudville tonight. This class is gloomy. I hate this. I don't understand why they won't cooperate. Even in rows they fight. Nick and Matt got into it over a pencil. How silly.

December 11
Donna was in total amazement that Todd and Brian felt no remorse being involved in the fight. She asked me if I dealt with this every day. She was surprised when I gave her examples.

December 19
Laurie came in to teach a Christmas lesson while I conducted personal interviews. When I came back in I noticed paper clips all over the floor. The kids began talking about getting hit on the head and arms with the paper clips. I think I need a new line of work. On top of all of this, I have recess duty.

At night, I would lie awake trying to think of possible solutions. *We need a project. It has to be something that is fun but presents a challenge. It has to be something that we can get immersed in so that it will overpower our difficulty in working with each other. There has to be something.* The answer came one day while the class and I walked to music class through the gym. *This gym is sure dark. Wouldn't it be nice to have more lights or windows in here. Even a new coat of paint would make a difference. That's it! We could paint the gym. What sixth grader would turn down an opportunity to paint?*

The Parent Teacher Association agreed to buy the paint, and the class and I agreed to paint the entire gym. On a Saturday, about 80% of the class gathered in the gym armed with rollers, paint brushes, and lots of newspapers. It took us all day, and it wasn't the best painting job ever done, but it did succeed in helping us work as a group for that day. The class seemed proud to tell the others at the school that we painted it. We felt good about completing the job and helping our school. I would like to say that this magic moment pulled us together and we lived happily every after, but

it did not. The spirit of community lasted about a week, and then we were back to where we began. At the end of that year, I wrote:

> Last two weeks of school. Sadness, lots of things not accomplished. I've come to realize that this group will never accomplish or reach goals that I wanted to attain.

This is one of the continual unplanned challenges in creating a community. The memory of that group still fills me with sadness, but I've come to realize that I can't fix or change everything. I can be extremely creative, observe daily, read every book on the subject, but I can't make a positive community happen everytime.

Qamanig: Designing Celebrations

In the forests of the north, the branches of the spruce trees collect the snow. With the boughs acting as a protector for the ground below, the area under the trees is covered with just a sprinkling of snow. The forest then becomes an uneven surface of high planes of snow between the trees and low circular valleys underneath each tree. The area at the base of each tree is called *qamanig.* Even though the *qamanig* offers little insulating warmth through the winter, it does offer the gift of spring. While the rest of the ground is covered with the winter's accumulation of snow and the temperatures begin to rise, the *qamanig* comes to life. Under the protection of the branches, small birds congregate looking for food, insects suddenly appear, and small intensely colored flowers push through the earth. The *qamanig* is an oasis of sight, sound, and color in a desert of white. Like the *qamanig*, celebrations become the oasis where everyone gathers. **Celebrations are like the first signs of spring. Everything becomes new again; everything becomes possible.**

Just as the *qamanig* collects birds, bugs, and blooms as signs of spring, I begin collecting artifacts as a quiet way of rejoicing in our being together. Photographs, class books, and mementos are the artifacts that record our class history and the evidence of our year together.

The camera becomes my tool for recording our life together. I begin with the pictures from the home visits. The pictures I take of the students, families, and pets are displayed in the room on the first day of school. After a month, the back bulletin board becomes littered with scenes depicting science experiments, field trips, public performances, visitors, and being together. *I love the first time I add a new batch of*

pictures to the wall. Students will crowd around. They first find themselves and then the talking begins. I hear "Oh, remember when you. . . ," "Hey, that was our bridge. We forgot to. . .", "Look, there's Aluniqua. We should write her and tell her about. . . ." **We celebrate in our remembrances and conversations.**

When the bulletin board becomes too crowded with pictures, this is a sign that we are ready to begin to celebrate in a public way. The students write a brief caption for each picture, and then the pictures and captions are combined into a class photo album. After the album is all complete, the students can sign up to take it home for an evening to share with parents. **The celebration ripples outward, including others, which makes our celebration more significant.**

Borrowing an idea from the primary classrooms, we create class books, each student writing and illustrating a page. I assemble it and it becomes a published book in our classroom library. One year, we modeled our book after D. Wiesner's book *June 29, 1999.* On the day we assembled the book, we invited parents in for a lunch of vegetable soup and bread. As we all ate, each student stood and read their page. The book and the lunch was a literary way to celebrate our being with each other. We create many such class books, ranging from ABC books to informational books.

Mementos are another way we celebrate together. Thank-you notes from visiting guests are read at the daily meetings and posted on the bulletin board for all to see. Letters from previous students are also shared. Often when I make presentations to other school districts or other groups of teachers, they will write notes to my students. These are shared upon my return. Wasp nests, pussy willows, beaver-chewed branches, and brochures are collected from our trips and excursions and find favored places in the classroom.

Mementos aren't always "things". Last year's class decided the song "Do You Hear the People Sing?" from *Les Miserable* was their theme song. They sang it on field trips, on our walks, and whenever things weren't going well within the classroom. They also chose to share it at the school's end-of-the-year assembly. Another class fell in love with Robert Service's (1916) "The Cremation of Sam McGee". They would break into group recitation whenever one student began, "There are strange things done in the midnight sun . . .".

This year, as a class we won first place in the district science fair. We were disappointed to learn that we could not take our project to the state contest in Anchorage. We decided to celebrate by taking an imaginary trip to Anchorage, so we spent Friday "visiting" all the sights and participating in the state, national, and

universe science fair. We won first prize in each, of course. We ended the day with the presentation of a five-foot first-place blue ribbon. Others in the school really didn't understand the importance of the blue ribbon outside our door, but we did. This reinforces Peterson's idea (1992):

> Celebrations whose purpose is to recognize success cannot be truly appreciated by outsiders. Only members of a community who live closely together can weigh the significance of such an event. (42)

We celebrate birthdays, personal triumphs, and group accomplishments. We have good-bye parties and welcoming brunches. We have parties just to celebrate being together. On days when it's -40 degrees Fahrenheit outside and we can't see out the window because of the ice fog, we'll make hot chocolate and pop popcorn, grab our pillows, shut the door and read for the day. Other events help make us feel special about being together. We write and perform musicals and put on dinner theaters. We create our own business to earn the $3,000 to go on a week-long camping trip in Denali National Park.

Celebrations can be carefully orchestrated like the trip to Anchorage, or spontaneous like the hot chocolate. *What I've discovered is that it's important to stop and take the time to do it. There's such a special feeling after our celebrations. All the "I's" become "us" as we smile, giggle, and relish being together. It is like being nestled under the boughs of the spruce, laughing and enjoying our special place while the rest of the world is still encased in snow.* It brings all that I value - love, caring, compassion, respect, and joy of companionship - together for that moment. As the days lengthen and the temperatures increase, the *qamanigs* widen and extend past the base of the trees. Spring expands outward like our celebrations.

The snow is almost gone; breakup almost over. There are still patches of snow ringing trees, hiding under the porch steps, and banking the north side of the shed, clinging tightly to winter, reluctant to yield their treasures. Eventually they will go, but only after many long days of warmth. These areas require patience. Right now, I'm left with new-found treasures lying in the sun on the back porch of my mind, drying out in excitement, waiting for me to carefully examine them again. At my feet, I survey my yard—my roots of community. It's green, it's healthy, and despite a few thin patches here and there, it appears to be doing quite well.

CHAPTER 4
OFFERING COMMUNITY: ARE WE THERE YET?
FACILITATING A PARENT COMMUNITY

Note to the Reader

In this chapter, I use the metaphor of driving to Anchorage as a way to share my change of thinking concerning a parent community. I begin with a history of my attitude toward parent involvement. I show how I was influenced by national and local views to alter my thinking. Through readings and conversations with colleagues I reveal how I gradually change in my actions and attitudes towards parents, with the result being my intentional creation of a parent community.

The next part of the chapter illustrates the changes I made to facilitate this type of community. Moving away from a formal way of transmitting information to the parents, I show how I work to transform my thinking and actions to develop a gentle flow of information and conversation in both directions.

In the next section of this chapter, I share the problems that arise and questions that persist as I attempt to create the parent community. Through continual self questioning and the jarring of parent interviews, I realize I'm not working to build a community but instead finding ways to connect home and school. I suddenly recognize the need to reshape my picture of a parent community.

The concluding portion of this chapter shows how I used my persistent questions and critical insights about the initial part of my parent community inquiry to facilitate a parent community based on personal relationships.

I learn an important lesson in this part of my study. It was only after listening to my inner questions, honestly examining the parents' comments, and then stepping back from my study that I could gain a true picture of my actions versus my intentions.

Imagine a land larger than Texas with barely enough people to fill the Cotton Bowl. That's Interior Alaska.

Sandwiched between the Alaska Range to the south and the Brooks Range to the north, the Interior is the largest region in Alaska. Vast expanses of untouched birch and spruce forests are separated by thousands of miles of rivers.

Although Alaska is big—about one-fifth the size of the Lower 48—travelers rarely realize what that means until they arrive at the Canadian border or rent a car and start driving.

—"Traveling Through the Interior," 1994

Alaska's size is a difficult concept to comprehend. As a resident of Fairbanks, my closest town is Anchorage, which is three hundred fifty-seven miles away. Driving to Anchorage from Fairbanks is a straightforward task. There are no four-lane interchanges, cloverleaf overpasses, or multitudes of exit signs; there is only one road and eight hours of driving. There is very little chance of getting lost. But as a traveler, I must be willing to accept the long stretches of driving, to adapt to the changeable weather, and to face the unexpected challenges along the way. I encountered all of these on my parent involvement "journey". This is an account of my five-year adventure across the landscape of parent involvement in my attempt to reach my destination: community.

Planning the Trip

Years ago when I traveled to Anchorage, I liked to travel alone. I knew the road *(or thought I did)* and I didn't need anyone's help. I could make my own stops when I needed and eat cookies, chips, and granola bars along the way without feeling guilty; listen to my favorite music; or think in silence. Then when I reached Anchorage, I could sleep, shop, or go to plays when I wanted. The time was my own. My trip, my ideas, my fun, my, my, my . . . .

That's how I began my teaching career—traveling alone. I knew what I wanted to accomplish in the classroom, and I really didn't want parents around to ask questions. Besides, I was the professional. What did the parents know about

education? I was the ultimate "orchestrator" (Atwell, 1987) within my classroom domain. Pride, fear, and distance described my attitude toward parents the first few years of my teaching.

I took pride in doing everything by myself. I was the director and main actor, the students were the supporting cast, and the school and parents were the audience. An example of my attitude at this time was the cooking of the class Thanksgiving dinner during my first year of teaching. *We'll need at least two turkeys, one baked potato for each of us, some kind of salad, and of course, pumpkin pie. I'll do the shopping the week before. I'll put the kids in cooking groups; each can prepare one of the dishes. The hardest part will be monitoring the stove in the staff lounge. I can't leave the kids alone too long. Maybe we can plan the actual baking times to overlap the recess time. That way the kids will be out of the room for some of the time I'll have to spend at the stove.* On the day of the dinner, I didn't have time to pause one moment. I was constantly working with the kids in the classroom and then rushing down the hall, around the corner to the staff lounge to check the oven. I must have walked thirty miles that day. *Roller skates! I need roller skates to save time going from the room to the staff lounge.* Other teachers were amazed; parents were impressed. It never occurred to me to ask parents for help, either with donating some of the food or with the actual cooking.

At this point in my teaching career, I believe I was afraid of groups of parents. I was fairly confident when talking individually with them but felt very uneasy when many of them were together. Parents are like children—they think of more things when they're in groups than when they're alone. During the traditional school Open House, all the parents come in for a designated half hour to see their child's classroom and meet the teacher. Each fall this gathering made me very nervous, and I always spent a week preparing for the event. *Do I have everything ready? I have a half hour to fill up. I can talk about the school rules, my rules, student expectations, books, field trips, homework, detention, and cold weather policy. That should fill up the time. If it doesn't, the children can show the parents their desks and tour the room. What if they ask me something I can't answer? What if they challenge my rules or my expectations?* On the night of Open House, I welcomed the families into the room, then started a nonstop one-sided dialogue, covering all the items on my list plus telling them how wonderful it was going to be. I talked so fast and so much there was no time for questions. They left and I collapsed in a chair, relieved that Open House was over for another year. Then I locked my door and left.

I understand now that I was involving parents, but in a very traditional way (Greenwood & Hickmann, 1991). Through my planned events within the classroom, the parents were the passive receivers of information dispensed by me.

In my dealings with parents, I regarded teaching on a military base an advantage. Leaving it to go home was like leaving one world and entering another, and I appreciated the distance between the two. Since most of my classroom families did all their shopping at the military stores and didn't generally venture off the post, I didn't see them as I went about my daily routine. I didn't want to be asked, "How's Susie doing?" while trying to choose tomatoes for dinner. I liked being able to leave the military community at the end of each day. It was even a long-distance phone call from the Army post to my home, though I lived only fifteen minutes away. The additional phone charges provided enough of a deterrent to parents calling me and me calling them. It allowed me to separate my personal life from my school life, and I liked it.

This is how I taught for the first three years. I planned, drove, and enjoyed the trip by myself. However, in casual conversation, I discovered the advantage of listening to others share their recent experiences in driving to Anchorage. In school, I noticed other teachers using parent help when they needed an extra adult. The teachers still seemed in control. *Maybe it is possible to have parents as helpers. I need to think about this carefully. I could do more and bigger projects if I had help. Maybe they can be useful without getting in the way.* So I began to cautiously request parents to come into the classroom to help with specific jobs.

Dear Mrs. White,

Would you be willing to help us bake cookies next Thursday? I would like you to monitor the ovens in the staff lounge from 11:00–2:30. Please let me know if this is possible.

Mrs. Austin

I'll tell the secretaries that she is coming, and they can direct her to the staff lounge. That way she won't have to come down to the classroom and interrupt the class. As the students finish mixing, they can take the full cookie sheets down to Mrs.

White, and she can take it from there. I'll leave directions for her about what to do when she's done, then she can leave whenever all the cookies are finished baking. I'll need to remember to send her a thank-you note. I was willing to ask for help, but not willing to share the events or students within the classroom. **I was afraid of parents judging me.**

I really didn't want the parents in my classroom, but I learned to use them on my terms. On field trips I asked parents to show up fifteen minutes before the bus left. I told them what students they were to be with and what to expect. I left no room for error, nor did I have them in the room for very long. I wanted them for the specific event and once their usefulness ended, to leave.

Inviting Passengers

While waiting for a class to begin at the university, I ate a cookie and read the notices on a bulletin board in the hallway. "Wanted: A rider to Anchorage. Pay half the gas." *Hmm, that's interesting. Here's another one.* "Fantastic Offer! I'm going to Anchorage next weekend. I have room for three people. If interested, call . . .". *There seem to be lots of these notices. It appears to be a popular thing to do. I never seriously thought about inviting people along.*

I began to notice other teachers and their interactions with parents. The primary classrooms, especially, had parents in and out of the room all the time. Parents seemed to be an accepted part of the teaching day. They brought cupcakes for parties, helped with art projects, accompanied the class on field trips, prepared teaching materials, and worked with students. It seemed that everyone was dealing with parents in some way, while I continued to keep my door shut. My research partner, Shirley Kaltenbach (1991), began a study that involved parents in a consistent teaching situation within the classroom. Daily, I heard her enthusiastic reports about the benefits of parents in the classroom. I couldn't help but compare her room to mine. The whole idea nagged at me.

Professional journals reported the importance of more parent involvement. The more practical journals, such as *Teaching Pre K–8,* ran monthly feature articles written expressly to parents for the teacher to copy and send home. The articles included ways the parents could help their child at home and in school. *Educational Leadership* and other more theoretical journals published articles exploring new ways to actively involve parents in the school. *Is more being written about this, or am I just noticing it more since I'm trying to sort out my thinking?* I talked with other teachers

about their approach to parent involvement. *How do you use parents? What problems do you have? What benefits do you see?* My school district included parent involvement as a district-wide goal. *Interesting idea, but they didn't tell us how to reach this goal.* My school's Parent Teacher Organization began to send home surveys each fall to identify parents who were available to help during the school day.

About this same time, I began to change my role as teacher with my sixth-grade students. I became more of a facilitator rather than a director. The students and I began making decisions together; we worked at forming a community of learners. *All right, I give up. Everything indicates that this is good idea. If I'm willing to share learning with my students, then I should be willing to be more open in the classroom with parents.* I read about it, I heard about it, and finally I began tentative steps to include parents. *I will invite the parents to go on the trip with me, but they have to sit in the back seat.*

Reading the Milepost

Almost everyone in Alaska consults *The Milepost* before traveling. It's a very detailed description of Alaskan roads, often making comments on the scenic viewpoints in mile-by-mile increments. My "Milepost" map was fairly basic. My major goal was to provide ways for the parents to make a stronger connection with their child and the classroom. I wanted the parents to move from a passive role of supporter and audience to a more active role as partner in their child's education. (Berger, 1991; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991). Research appeared to very clear about the positive implications of parent involvement. In a summary of school and family partnership research, Epstein (1992) writes:

> One major message of the early and continuing studies is simply and clearly that families are important for children's learning, development and school success. The research suggests that students at all grade levels do better academic work and have more positive attitudes, higher aspirations, and other positive behaviors if they have parents who are aware, knowledgeable, encouraging and involved. (p. 1141)

If I wanted parents to be more active, then I had to change my role. I had to quit being the ultimate director and build a new view of myself in relationship to my parents.

Beginning Communication

Newsletter

I begin creating a new role for myself with a fairly safe approach—a weekly newsletter. I was familiar with writing notes to my students, so this was familiar task. The audience was different, however. Before I started, I considered the parents in my community and my purpose for the letter. *I want to write a letter that everyone will read. I'll cover the general academic happenings to keep the parents informed of what we've covered during the week. I do know that some of my parents didn't have a very positive experience and feel threatened by school. I want this letter to seem friendly, so I'll write it by hand rather than type it. It won't seem so official that way.* Every Thursday night, I sat down and wrote about the events in the classroom:

> Dear Parents,
>
> This week we finished our reading book, *The Phantom Tollbooth.* We enjoyed reading about the adventures of Milo and Tock. We're still working on reducing fractions. In social studies, we are halfway through our ancient Greece project. That should be finished by next Wednesday. In science, we're learning the difference between solutions and suspensions.
>
> Sincerely,
>
> Mrs. Austin

The newsletter was always written on cherry pink paper, so the parent could identify it among all the other school papers. I was never sure how many read the letter, but I felt like I was making contact with parents. *I feel good about sending this weekly letter home. Am I doing this because I really believe in informing parents, or is it because it's easier to give in to pressure and now I'm "politically correct"? I don't know at this point.* **I know now that this continual questioning that permeates the entire part of this study enabled me to continually move forward in creating my own understanding. The questions are an essential part of my growth.**

Take Home Journal

The following year, feeling comfortable with my weekly newsletters, I added the "take home journal" in conjunction to my weekly newsletter as a way of informing parents. I borrowed the idea from Mary Carolyn Ramsaur, a first-grade teacher at a neighboring school. Using a small notebook, on Thursday each student writes a letter to their parents:

> Dear Mom and Dad,
>
> How are you doing? Why don't we go sledding on Saturday? I have a basketball game on Monday after school. I may be late coming home.
>
> Love,
>
> Brian

I take the journals home on Thursday evening and write a brief note to parents:

> Hi,

I need a neutral but friendly way to start. "Hi" is good. That way I don't have to worry about getting all the names correct. **What does this say about me and my value of the individual if I'm not willing to learn the names of the parents?**

What has happened to Brian this week that's important? I have met with the parents about his lack of participation. They would probably like to know what has happened since that meeting.

> Since we had our meeting, Brian has really turned on. He smiles, he participates, he answers questions. He's a different child.
>
> Thanks,

This will let them know I appreciate their efforts and it's a neutral way to end the letter. How do I want to sign my name? Mrs. Austin sounds so formal. I'll use my whole name instead.

Terri Austin

Then over the weekend, the parents write back to their child and to me:

Dear Brian,

How are you doing? Sorry, but we can't go sledding this weekend. We have other plans, but maybe another weekend. Danny spent the night with you last night; hope you had fun. It was nice having him over and we were happy that he could attend church with us too. I'm glad you are doing better in school; you have a wonderful teacher.

Love,

Mom and Dad

Dear Mrs. Austin,

How are you doing? We are doing fine. I am glad that I attended the meeting on Tuesday. I like the way you teach, I wished I could have learned that way when I was in sixth grade. I think that it's just great and fun. I am glad that Brian is doing better in school. I hope he will continue. He likes you very much.

Love,

Ann and Bob Roberts

Their letter is quite different from mine. It's friendlier. They use compliments and the whole tone is more open. I need to think about this. I continued writing my letters in a rather neutral style throughout the year. **I was willing to have the parents**

in the car, but I wasn't sure if I wanted to talk with them for the whole trip. I felt they should appreciate just being in the car. Control continues to be an issue.

Parker Palmer (1993) contends that in general the human nature within all of us wishes to avoid knowledge that pulls and tugs at us to change ourselves. With the addition of the take home journal, I was purposely engaging in the pulls and tugs Parker describes. I am seeking to change myself by examining and questioning my purpose, my thinking, and my actions regarding the parents of my students.

Following Tradition

When traveling to Anchorage, it's a tradition to stop at the Gold Hill Store, located on the edge of civilization, before leaving Fairbanks behind. Here the driver makes the pretense of stopping for gas, but in reality it's time for all the travelers to stock up on candy bars, chips, sodas, and at least one ice cream bar. All are essential items to ease the travelers into the long trip ahead.

In a sense, I needed to ease myself into the idea of more active parent involvement, and I also thought I needed to ease the parents into their new role as well. As I continued to change my perceptions about myself as a teacher, I was more willing to change my views about parents. The more risks I took with my students, the more risks I was willing to take with the parents. I was changing, but were the parents? I assumed the parents needed to adjust too, but maybe they were more ready to step into an active role than I wanted to acknowledge. Possibly I was the only one who needed to change.

At this point, I felt the need to change my approach to the weekly communication. I saw positive changes in the classroom that occurred from more open and friendlier communication and I wondered what would happen if I tried a similar approach with the parents. As I experimented with the newsletters and the take home journals, I created three other communication paths.

Family Letters

I changed my approach to the weekly newsletters. I now referred to them as the "Family Letter" and saw them as a connecting link between the classroom family and the home family. *I see now that I need to treat the parents in the same open friendly way I treat my students.* So I changed my approach and my style of writing.

Hi,

Well, we're into our second week of school. As a class, we are working out those minor problems that occur when there are twenty-seven people in a room all day. This group is terrific since every student is kind and considerate. They are delightful to work with. *It's important to share positive comments about the class. It helps the members of the class to see themselves in a positive light and it helps the parents feel good about the school.*

Over the summer, I read the most wonderful book by Peter Stillman (1989). It's called *Families Writing* and it has wonderful ideas for families. I would like to share his ideas with you, so each week, I'll insert an idea from his book. *This is the first time I've shared something so professional with the parents. I wonder how they will respond to the ideas?* On the inside front cover, it says, "In warm, engaging terms Stillman explores the whys of family writing: its value in forging an unbreakable link between past and present, present and future; its incomparable role in keeping memories fresh; and its astonishing power for recall and discovery." The first idea is on the back of this page.

The next couple of weeks, the students and I will be examining patterns. This includes number patterns in math; visual patterns on maps, grids, and graphs; writing patterns used by authors; and natural patterns in science. *I'll invite the parents to be involved in the idea of patterns.* If you have anything you would like to contribute to these topics, please let me know or send it in.

Our first money-making project (the whys will be explained at Open House) is September 29th. It will be a huge indoor garage sale here at school. We have a storage area at school, so as you collect donated items, you can bring them to school. Please price each item before you bring them in. That will save us much time.

Open House is this Wednesday, September 11, from 6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. I hope to see you there. This is a very important meeting where we will review the year and expectations and explore the possibility of a spring camping trip. Please bring your child since we will be doing some writing together. *I like using the collective pronouns. It implies togetherness.*

I need another positive statement to end the letter. I enjoyed seeing all of you at the picnic Saturday. I'm still trying to thaw. *We'll have to plan something warmer in the spring. I want them to know now that we'll all be getting together again.* Enjoy your week and the beautiful fall colors, and I'll see you on Wednesday. *I'm taking it for granted that everyone will be at the Open House.*

Terri Austin

My letters became friendlier and less formal. I included more requests for help on field trips or projects. I informed parents of upcoming projects and events. A regular feature of the family letter was the "Dates to Remember" on the last page. Here, I listed all the upcoming events by date, time, and place. *This section will be helpful for parents who are in a hurry. They can glance at the list and know exactly what's happening when and where.* I also added a cartoon. *I really want the letters to be read. The cartoon will add lightness and fun to the letter, so maybe more parents will be inclined to read it.*

Take Home Journal Revisited

Along with the changes in the family letter, I altered my approach to the take home journal. The writing schedule remained the same, but my letters paralleled the family letter in my change in thinking.

Hi Nancy,

I like using her name. I feel like I know her after the home visits and the family picnic.

I didn't realize you and Mike were so ill. *Dave told me about both his parents being sick for the past week.* This flu thing is really bad isn't it?

I think sometimes Dave suffers from "middle child" syndrome. As a middle child, I can relate to his feelings.

I think it is important for me to share my experiences with Nancy and Mike. I wasn't the oldest so I didn't get some of the privileges, and I wasn't the youngest, so I wasn't considered cute. However, Dave has some terrific qualities. He's very much a leader, he's articulate, he's smart, he works well with peers, and he has a great sense of humor. *I want Nancy to see that I've really observed Dave and seen positive characteristics and that I have a plan in mind for the rest of the year.* My goal this year for Dave is to give him an opportunity to use all these qualities, so he has a very strong sense of who he is. He does now, but I would like him to leave this class with confidence and assurance that he can tackle anything thrown in his path. I hope this makes sense; it's rather late.

Rest and recover,

Terri

I'll sign my first name. I want Nancy to feel comfortable with me. I wonder how she will respond?

When Dave returned his journal, I eagerly opened to Nancy's letter.

Dear Terri,

Thanks for the note. I think you're right about Dave. He's expressed concerns about being "pushed aside." I am trying to think of some ways to spend "one- on-one" time with him.

I feel so tired all the time. My new job is challenging and exciting but so draining sometimes. I feel like a "mom" to all the nurses and aides on my floor (which, in essence, is what I am). Mike is so busy at home, too. I don't know how much I am helping him. I try, but sometimes it doesn't seem like it's enough. All in all, I hope we are holding things together. I have spoken to Dave and Sam about going to

bed earlier and they're agreed. We'll see how it works this coming week. I overslept (first time ever) this morning and was an hour late to work. I told the boys we just can't keep going like we're going (I'm not the Energizer Bunny) . . . .

Well, you have a GREAT week and thanks again for all your hard work and dedication with the kids!

We love you,

Mike and Nancy

WOW! Nancy certainly responded openly. I know so much about her family now. Maybe I've underestimated the parents' desire to be active in school life. Her positive response gives me encouragement to continue.

Picnics

One year, the three sixth-grade teachers in my building decided to organize a family picnic before school started. We thought it would be good way to begin the year. In years past, the students and I met over the summer in the park close to the school as a way to get to know each other. This would be the first time parents would be included. *I never thought about inviting families before. My primary interest is the student; the parents are something that are attached to the students. I'm glad the other teachers and I are planning this together. I don't know if I would do it by myself.* Ninety percent of the families attended. We played games and ate the entire afternoon. *This was good way for me to see the parents and children in a natural setting. I learned a lot about the families by watching their interaction with each other and with other families. I'm not only learning about individual families, but I'm also learning about the military community and the strong influence it has on family life.*

The other teachers and I felt this was a very successful event. It was another way for me to interact with the students and their families, but I felt like it was only the beginning. I continued to search for something more.

Project Bags

At a January meeting of the Alaska Teacher Research Network, I shared my feelings of success with the take home journals, the family letters, and the picnic, but I

also shared my concern about parents questioning me on many of the classroom procedures.

"I don't understand the parents! I feel like I'm always explaining what we're doing in the classroom, but they still ask me questions like they've never heard about it before."

"What do they ask about?"

"They want to know about my emphasis on cooperative group work. It's January and they're still asking what does brainstorm, draft, and polish mean. We've gone over this at Open House, in family letters, and in the take home journals. Then when we meet in person, they STILL ask about it."

"I think they just can't see or picture in their mind what you're doing. What you do is so different from their experience of school."

"Do they ever visit the classroom?"

"No, that's a concern I still have. I thought I would have more parent volunteers because of the journals and letters, but I don't. You're right though, parents need to see what we're doing."

"But if they don't come in, how are you going to do that?"

"What if I try to send school home?"

The conversation continued on as we discussed the dilemmas of getting parents into the school and the classroom, but the idea of sending school home stayed with me. *How could I send school home? I could plan small activity nights in neighborhood homes once a month or so. Do I have that kind of time? Would parents come to that? If they are too busy to come to school, would they be too busy to come to this? Could I find the parents willing to host the gathering? They would have to be willing to have all the younger brothers and sisters as well. I would have to carry everything. I need to think of something else. What if I created projects that demonstrate some fundamental beliefs of the classroom? They could be sent home on a weekly basis and would be designed to include the entire family.*

Thus, the idea of project bags was born. By the end of the winter meeting, I knew what I wanted. The following weekend, I created thirty project bags for my class. I placed the directions in a plastic protector, gathered all the materials, and filled the numbered canvas book bags. Next I created a student schedule rotating the project bags, so that each student took home a new project every week. **Again questioning prods my thinking. Building on my understanding for the need for meaningful, interactive homework (Epstein, 1993), my knowledge of the likes and dislikes of**

this age group, and the desire to reach parents, I worked to develop a creative solution that combines all these elements.

After carefully considering my energy level and the families' busy weekend schedules, I decided that the project bags would go home every Friday and be returned on Tuesday. That would give the families ample time to do the project and still give me time to organize the bag contents for the next Friday. *I could put the take home journal and the family letter in the project bag on Friday. Then all communication would be together in one place for the parents.*

Video Library

The idea of viewing the classroom intrigues me. What would happen if I videotaped classroom events and then made the tapes available for students to take home and share with their parents? This would be another way of sending school home to the parents. The same year I began the project bags, I began assembling a video library. My goals for this project included:

1. Students would help videotape the events.
2. Classroom life would be the subject of the videos.
3. A journal would accompany the tapes for a response from the families.

I was totally immersed in the idea of parent involvement now. Along with teaching, I composed the family letter, wrote in twenty-seven take home journals, organized picnics, created project bags, and videotaped events in the classroom. Montessori (1995) calls this heightened awareness a sensitive period. It involves an intense emphasis on a topic or action that occupies a person's whole concentration, which ultimately leads to a new understanding. And at this point, I was deep in my parent involvement sensitive period. I spent about the same number of hours focusing on this issue as I did preparing for the classroom. I soon realized I had underestimated the length of the trip and the conditions of the road.

Driving the Highway

The tape is playing, the bag of chips is open, and the tank is full. Ahead is the bright promise of a relaxing day driving through scenic Alaska. Pulling out of the Gold Hill Store, we make predictions about the potential moose and bear sightings. Then reality sets in. The car wallows from the permafrost heaves in the road. The construction work on the Nenana Bridge requires a forty-five-minute wait. Three

hours on the other side of Denali Park, blizzard conditions hit and the car slows to a crawl. The bag of chips is empty. The sparkle of the day fades, and tensions inside the car expand, filling every available space. With my move to initiate more parent involvement, I had periods of both smooth scenic driving and roads filled with potholes. Only one of my creative efforts proved to be an easy path.

Family Letter Revisited

The act of composing the family letter is fairly easy to do once I identify the topics to discuss. Sometimes I keep a mental list of things to talk about, and at other times I keep a written list on my calendar. I think it depends on how harried I feel during the week. I usually write the letter on Thursday night after I finish the take home journals or early Friday morning at school. But no matter how I plan it, I seem to feel rushed and often scurry around getting it copied and stapled at the last minute.

I continue to wonder if the parents ever receive the family letter. No matter how careful I am about seeing them placed in the project bags, they tend to reappear. As the students clean out their desks, I see many family letters crumpled, written on, torn, and mixed in with cracker wrappers and pencil shavings in the dark corners of their desks. *Do these letters ever get home? How effective is the family letter? Is it a connecting link between the classroom and the home as I envisioned it to be?*

Take Home Journals: Another Look

I begin every year being excited about the take home journals. I look at the clean pages in the journal and wonder where our conversations will lead. After about two months of writing weekly in twenty-seven or so journals, it becomes another weekly task. I realize the importance of them, but frankly, I dread sitting down every Thursday night and writing.

At the end of each Thursday, I gather up the journals, toss them into my canvas bag, and head for home. After dinner, I stack them up on my dining table, turn on the TV, and begin to write. Since the task fills the entire evening, I play games with myself. *After five journals, I can get something to drink. Keep writing . . . Ah, the halfway mark. I'll let the dogs outside. Keep writing . . . When I'm done, I'll read my new mystery book.* I keep doing this week after week because I understand the importance of keeping in touch with parents. I don't enjoy or have the time to call every parent each week, so the journals are a good compromise. Besides, I like the students writing to parents as well.

Of course it's easier to respond in journals where the parents and I have continuing conversations. For the usual four or five parents who never answer either their child's letter or mine, I have to decide what to do. At the beginning of the year, I continue to write a short positive note, but if it continues, I struggle with the effort. *Why should I continue to spend my time writing if this person never has the courtesy to respond? At least the parents could write to their child.* It's very disheartening to open an empty journal at the end of a long, tiring teaching day. But then there are surprises. I wrote in Jessica's journal for a month before her mother finally responded. From then on, we had delightful conversations. *I have to decide how dedicated I am to this task each Thursday night.* **It's the unevenness of the journals that makes it difficult at times. I always write because I feel it's my job to make contact with parents, but I'm not sure the parents feel that kind of obligation. I also write because of the unexpected surprises like Jessica's mom. Like the journal writing in the classroom, it is the hope of the possible that keeps me writing. I question my motives and values and wonder why I am doing this.** It's inconsistency of the journal responses that create a bumpy road in my parent involvement journey.

Project Bags

The project bags are the easy sections of the trip. The students eagerly look forward to Friday afternoons when they find out which project they are taking home. No one forgets to take them home, and very few students forget to bring them back on time. I periodically check the bags and am always surprised how well kept they are. My adult volunteer (provided by the school parent organization) always appears on time and efficiently checks and restocks every bag. Here the road is straight and filled with scenic spots. The driving is terrific.

Videotaping

The potholes, the blizzard, and the road construction all came with the videotaping. Nothing went according to my perfect plan. As we got into the daily routine and normal pressure of the classroom day, the video project got pushed to the side. Finally, by the second week in October, everything was ready. My camera was set up in the back of the room, the tape was in, and we began. I wanted to record our opening routine of story sharing and singing. That evening I reviewed the tape and discovered that I had forgotten to turn on the microphone. So I did it again the next

day. For the next two weeks there was a problem every time I tried to record something: the wrong lens was in, the tape didn't record for some reason, the camera got moved and I recorded twenty minutes of the wall. I was very discouraged. The students, however, were becoming very used to the camera in the room. It was set up in the library area, and we learned to walk around it or climb under it to find books to read. Finally, I was able to videotape several examples of classroom life. I recorded our opening book share time, our Monday work with our first-grade buddies, and our party with our college pen pals.

The students and I set up the video checkout sheet, and nobody took the tapes home! When I asked the students about this, they told me the tapes weren't exciting enough. In December, my husband videotaped a musical performance we performed for the parents. Most of the parents attended the evening, yet this tape has been checked out every single day since its creation. The students sign up in advance to take it home.

I stopped taping in January. My camera developed a strange quirk of stopping in the middle of recording. I never had the energy to continue. The students seemed uninterested in sharing excerpts from the classroom and only eager to see the performance tape. Driving conditions are now treacherous, and I wonder if we should turn back.

Stopping for Gas

Stopping for gas has nothing to do with the need to refuel the car. It's a time for the driver and passengers to mentally and physically take a break. So at the midway point at a small truck stop in a high, narrow valley pass, the driver and passengers get out, kick the tires, stretch, restock the candy bar supply, and think about the past hours on the road.

At this point in my travels, I'm beginning to seriously question my destination and my methods of travel. I expected to see an increase of parents in the classroom and more evidence of school and home being connected. I realized I needed more information, so I, as I learned from my students, I ask.

I wanted to find out what the parents and students think, so in April I conducted a survey. For the students, I asked them to respond to a questionnaire, and for the parents, I posed an open-ended question in the context of my letter in the take home journal. I asked both groups two questions about the project bags; did they do the activities and did they see a connection with the curriculum in the classroom.

Many parents talked about the issue of time. For those who talked about family time, their voices were strongly in favor of project bags. In John's journal, his father wrote: "I think the whole idea of the family getting involved with the projects is terrific." Anna's mother shared a similar sentiment: "I liked the fact that we MUST sit down and all play together. I see the project bags bringing the family together." The students also shared their ideas about the time spent with their families. In her survey, Mandy wrote, "Our family is sometimes together when we do this, and when that happens it's a really special time to do something together." Christy stated, "I think I and my family like it because this is basically the only time we can get together because our schedules are so busy." Jesse said, "The only one that doesn't play with the project bags is my cat." *Not all parents responded, but those who did were very positive.*

The other element was the connection between the project bags and the learning taking place in the classroom. One response on the student survey was, "My family thinks they're fun because it shows them how I think in school." *I never thought of the projects as illustrating student reasoning and thinking, but I guess it does. It also shows the child how parents think. It has the possibility of being the ultimate multiage learning group.* The same student wrote, "My mom usually helps me with the project bags because she wants me to understand things that I don't know." At first, I was concerned that many mothers were the only ones involved with the student and the weekly project bags. Then I remembered that often the fathers were gone for field training. *I need to keep my community in mind when making judgments.* Mark's mother responded in her journal, "We especially like the project bag. It gives us entertainment as well as a learning experience." Throughout all the responses, most parents and students did not associate the home activities with school learning.

The last issue, and probably the biggest one, is the issue of home time, the actual time it takes to do the activities. Over and over again parents and students said their family life was so busy and so crowded, they found it difficult to do the projects, write in journals, or watch the videotapes. Joyce's mother stated in her journal, "At times, I must admit that we are pressed for time to do the project bag. If we were to omit one activity, it would be the project bag." Meg, a student, shared the same feeling: "I feel OK, but sometimes I don't have time for them." Again and again, the students repeated the same message: their families were too busy to participate. *How busy are they? I see school as the most important event in the students' lives, but do*

the parents? How do families decide priorities? Do I try to balance our views of the importance of school, or do I continue to push the priority of school? What is the best perspective? My questions really pushed me to consider school from a viewpoint I hadn't considered. I spent days pondering them and trying to understand the results from the survey.

The videotape disaster intrigues me. I thought the students would be clamoring to take all the tapes home to show parents, but the only tape they wanted to take home was the one of the musical performance. Christy's mother was the only parent who mentioned the videotapes in a journal response. She said, "The video actually brings families straight to the classroom." In the student survey, when asked why they didn't take a tape home, common answers were "I am not interested in them," "I don't have time," or "because I don't feel like it." Even though I talked about the availability of the tapes in the family letter, I never received a parent request to view them.

I'm doing a tremendous amount of work here, and I'm not really seeing more parent involvement. At least it's not visible in the classroom. I don't have parents knocking on the door to volunteer. I haven't really seen any change in their behavior. On the plus side, I feel more comfortable with them. I think I know more about each family, and that helps me deal with the individual students in the classroom. Is there an easier way to get to this point, though? Fog settled over the road. Driving became hazardous. **I see now that I was viewing parent involvement through a singular lens; by the number of parents physically present in the classroom or school (Kaltenbach, 1999). I expected parents to be engaged in traditional "parent" activities, and gave little value to the parents writing in the take home journal, attending school programs, or participating with the project bags.**

I decided to verbally interview parents, and my first opportunity arrived during the third quarter student-parent conferences. I talked with parents as they gathered around the refreshment table in the hallway.

Terri: A lot of teachers are talking about parent involvement. I'd like to know what you think that means.

Clarissa: To me parent involvement is basically what it says, getting involved and taking time out to see what your kids are doing. And if there is a weakness there, seeing what you can do or how you can help. Getting involved with their homework. Assisting

in any way you can. Getting to know their teacher and what's going on in the classroom.

Terri: Then, if I could ask you, what would be the best way you would like to be involved in Fred's school? What would work best for you?

Clarissa: To me, if I had more time to be here, and if I had more time to sit in on the classroom or just get involved more with the school. And you know that with my job, it doesn't allow me to do that.

Clarissa left, and Sally and Tom came over. Sue also joined us as we munched cookies and talked.

Terri: My question tonight is about parent involvement. . . . I'd like to know what parent involvement means to you.

Sally: Help with the child's studies here at school. That's becoming involved.

Sue: Do bake sales and everything else. Do that if they really need help.

Tom: Get involved with the kids in doing things, you know, a project maybe. For their class or something.

Terri: Kind of like the science fair type of thing.

All: Yes, yes . . .

Terri: So it's helping with homework. It's helping with those extra-curricular things like we're trying to do—raise money. It's also helping with those major projects that come along.

All: Yes. . . .

Terri: Anything else?

Sally: Anything that requires assembly, we become involved in.

Terri: *I'm getting rather discouraged here. So far none of the parents mentioned anything about the ways I'm offering to help them feel involved. I'm going to ask!* What do you think of the project bags that went home every week? Last week was the last week.

Sue: It is? Why?

Terri: Why, do you want some more? (Laughter.)

Sally: I think they're great.

Terri: Do you like it?

Sally: Yeah. It's more like an activity for them. They take it out and it's "Oh, we get to do this today." Alyssa would shout upstairs, "Elaine, come down, we have to do this for my school." Elaine would say, "Oh, we got a game again!" (Laughter.)

Terri: Did you like those?

All: Yeah . . .

Terri: What do you think of the take home journal?

Sally: I think it's good communication.

Terri: *Terrific! She sees the reason for the journal. At last, a connection.*

Sue: They might write more what they feel and not what they say.

Sally: Yeah, I know.

Terri: *Oh, they were talking about communicating with their child, not with me.*

Sue: Mandy doesn't say all the stuff she writes about.

We continue to talk as Jessica's parents and Pam and Al wander over to pick up a cookie or two.

Pam: Parent involvement means to me discussing with my children after school what they did during the day, helping with homework, and seeing if there's a time when I need to come to school and be involved in the school, whether it be with art or home economics. I don't think with the math or reading or writing the parent needs to be involved in school, but at home.

Al: The only thing I would add to that is try to be an active participant in what the child is going through. . . .

We talk a bit about respect—respect for teachers and respect for the children. Sally and Fred leave and as Diane joins us, Sue says good night.

Diane: Being involved in every aspect of your child's life, whatever that may be.

Al and Pam nod.

Terri: What's the best way for you to be involved in Aaron's school life?

Diane: Take part in it, you know, when he's doing his school work. Sit down and go over it with him and help him with it.

All of us chat a few minutes more and then the parents leave for home. As I organize the desks and fold tablecloths, I think about the evening's interviews. *Every parent's first response was to help with homework. Is this because it's such a concrete act? Or is it because it's the role society expects them to play? I thought Clarissa's response about wanting to help in the classroom but she couldn't because of work was interesting. It was obvious that she felt guilty because she couldn't do this. Is society expecting too much of parents? Am I? I'm discouraged about the things I'm doing. After the discussion tonight, maybe I should give it all up and let the parents just focus on helping with homework. It doesn't appear that I'm making much of a difference here.* **This is a very interesting place in my study. I'm seeking to build community with parents, yet I am continually focusing on parents seeing the connection between classroom learning and my created parent activities. I realize my value of community is not aligned with my actions of classroom connections.** My travels look bleak, but off in the distance, I see Wasilla.

Arriving in Wasilla (It's Not Anchorage Yet)

Wasilla is a small town about sixty miles from Anchorage. Reaching Wasilla is always celebrated by stopping at a local convenience store and buying either a cold soda or a hot cup of coffee. The parents and I pile out of the car and buy our drinks. We stare across the valley, looking at the sharp peaks of the Alaska Range. We've run out of words. *We haven't been talking about the same things at all. With all my communication, I really don't know these people.* I draw circles in the dust with a stick as I sit on a log in the parking lot. *I've been going in circles and wearing myself out with nothing to show for it. I've been working on this parent involvement idea for three years. Where do I go next? Do I walk away from the concept? If all they want to do is help with homework, let them, and forget about everything else. Did I rush into this because it was the latest educational fad? What do I want here?*

I look up and see a family pull up. They remind me of Jesse and his family. The last time I saw them was when I had to have a publication permission paper signed. *I had called Beth, Jesse's mom, and asked if I could come over. She said, "No problem," so I quickly drove over. I knocked on the door and Will, Jesse's father, invited me in. I stepped over toys, brushed a magazine from the couch, and sat down. Will and I chatted a few minutes about the hockey game on TV and his family vacation to Disneyland. Will went to the stairs and called up, "Beth, Terri's here!" and then he went to the basement stairs and called down, "Jess, Terri's here!" Beth came down and Jesse came up. We sat and chatted about summer plans, Jesse's drawings, college tuition, and seventh grade. After forty-five minutes, I finally got the paper signed and left. I was so struck with the visit, I sat in the car thinking about it. Every parent interaction should be like the visit to Jesse's home. This is really what I want. I want the ease and comfortableness just like with Jesse's parents. I don't want parent involvement at all. I want an easy relationship with parents. Is this it? Is this what I've been trying to find?* **Like the three significant teaching stories I shared at the beginning of this thesis, the account of visiting Jesse and his family becomes my critical story concerning parent community.**

It's time to toss the soda cans in the bin and continue on to Anchorage. As we approach the car, I invite my parents to sit in the front seat with me. We'll make the rest of the trip sitting together.

On to Anchorage!

For the inexperienced traveler, it's easy to assume that the trip is almost over, but for some reason, this last hour or so seems to be the longest part of the whole journey. The small groupings of stores and gas stations along the way fool the traveler into thinking that Anchorage is just around the next turn. Besides the increase in population, there are so many other sights to see. The mountains stand clear and sharp against the sky, birds glide by and rest in the marshes, giant green ferns hug the floor of the spruce forests, and the ocean flows in between the mud flats and the mouths of rivers. It's vastly different from everything we've seen along the way and it gives the traveler a new perception of Alaska.

In the last two years, I've changed my perspective about the idea of parent involvement. Now my goal each year is to attempt to help create a parent community, and like the tiny gas station and a house tucked in a corner of the forest, the parent community can involve just a parent and myself. Or it can involve other families as

well, similar to the villages built at the intersection of roads. The size of the community doesn't matter, it's the relationships that are important to me. This is exactly the value I attempt to enact with my students as I work to develop a personal relationship with each student. **I wonder why it took me so long to understand this?**

Another new view in the landscape of community is the realization that creating a parent community is different from creating a classroom community. This difference challenges me to be creative and inventive in considering possible solutions. These are some challenges I face. First, I don't see parents on a consistent basis, so every minute of contact needs to be used in building the community feeling. I can't waste one minute. Second, parents are not sixth graders. They are adults with their own schedules, priorities, and goals. I can't keep them in for recess if they don't follow through on commitments. Third, I have to be willing to accept their perceptions of school and learning. I can work at changing that perception, but in the beginning, I need to acknowledge their views. *This one can be especially hard. I love school, it's my favorite place to be, so I tend to feel defensive when parents display negative attitudes about school. I have to remember that parent attitudes are often a result of their own experiences with school (Sarason, 1995).* Fourth, and maybe the most important, I have to be willing to welcome them into my life and accept them as they are. Flexibility is vital. Christine Bowditch's 1994 article questioning the assumptions of parent involvement caused me to think carefully about my underlying suppositions about parents. She asserts, "The tensions created by the poor fit between nontraditional families and traditional schools need not be resolved by forcing families into a more traditional model" (p. 23). *Where am I in relation to this idea? Am I being led by the thinking of others and not critically examining the issue for myself? Am I not taking into account the individual aspects of each family? Am I trying to force families into my view of what families should be?* As I consider these new thoughts, I work to adapt the elements of climate, communication, consensus, challenges, and celebrations (elements I've successfully used in the classroom) to facilitate a parent community, and I begin to see new sights along the road.

Climate

The parents and I pause in our talking as we notice a family of geese nesting in the marsh by Wasilla Lake. I pull over to the side of the road so that we can watch the mother lead her little ones out into the lake. The mother duck seems so at ease and

confident in her environment; she knows exactly what to expect as she paddles around with her ducklings following her.

Like the mother duck, I'm at ease in my setting. My environment is my school and my classroom. *School is a comfortable place for me to be, but not necessarily for parents.* The students and I spend a lot of time in that setting, but the parents are occasional visitors. **Every parent interaction, except for the home visit, takes place in MY environment of school.** I needed to step out of my traditional setting and reach into their world, so I considered three areas that might broaden the concept of climate: being visible outside of the school, welcoming parents into the classroom, and treating parents as friends.

Becoming visible in the military community served two purposes. First, I wanted the parents and the children to see me as a person, not just the teacher who lived at school, and second, I wanted to see the parents in their environment. So Ken and I began riding our bicycles on the Army post. During our weekly biking treks around all the neighborhoods, we talked with the children and waved to parents. We watched parents water the lawn, wash cars, and walk dogs. We also took walks through the new construction areas, ate at their shopping mall, and occasionally exercised in their new gym facility. *Hmmm, three years ago, I didn't want to meet the parents, now I'm going out of my way looking for them. This is evidence of a real change in my thinking.* In later conversations with the parents, I better understood when they referred to an area of the post or the problems of living so close to others. **The neighborhood became the common ground or "classroom" for the parents and myself.** Furthermore, I learned about their physical community on my excursions. The more I learned, the more questions I had about military life. *I wonder how this new building will be used? It's right next door to the clinic, but it doesn't look like a medical building. I bet the parents will know. I'll ask around and see if they do.* **I'm changing the expected roles. The parents are now the experts and I'm the learner.**

My next step was to welcome the parents into the classroom. In family letters I repeated again and again, "Feel free to drop by anytime that's convenient for you." *I want to invite them in, but how do I really feel about parents in the classroom? What if it's one of those chaotic days and nothing's going right? What if we're in the middle of silent reading and they assume that I sit and read all day? Wait a minute! When I visited Jesse, I had to clear the couch to sit down. His little sister walked through the living room in a dripping bathing suit. When parents come to the classroom, they will*

see our clutter and our drips too. This is what school is like. **The repeated invitations were as much for the parents as they were for me. If I repeat it long enough, parents will come and I will believe all will be fine.** Next, I took the standard school sign off my door that said, "Students working. Do not interrupt. Please report to the office."

Sean's father visited us one Friday afternoon. *Yeah! He's one of the first parents to take the plunge and come see us.* Taking off his coat, he looked around and joined three students working with blocks on the floor in the back of the room. *I'm glad he came. He's our first dad. He must feel at ease: he just came in and immediately became involved. Now he's stretched out on the floor, listening to his group explain what it was trying to do. He's joined the perfect group. They are all girls and two of their fathers just left on a nine-week Arctic training mission. His attention today will help them.* During the ninety minutes he spent with us, his group talked continually and worked together to build a huge complicated structure of blocks. He left as quietly as he arrived. Some of the students hardly noticed his presence.

Other parents occasionally visited. Sam's mother and father took turns joining us on Friday mornings. Brandi's mother showed up one day right before lunch and told me, "I just wanted to have lunch with Brandi." Dave's mother would often casually drop by on her breaks from work. "I had a few minutes and wanted to know what he was doing today." Kim's dad often did the same thing. At the end of the year, Frank, Kim's dad, told me that he enjoyed visiting the room and felt at ease dropping in to see the happenings in the classroom. *I don't have to entertain or perform for parents. The parents are interested in being with their child, not me. We just do what we have to do, and the parents join in as much as they wish.*

I learned to relax and enjoy having the parents visit, but as I got to know families, I also realized that some work schedules or work requirements did not allow time for classroom calls. As I learned more about the military community, I understood the importance of being accessible to parents outside of school hours. At the beginning of school, I received a list of students, parents, addresses, and phone numbers. *If I have their phone number and address, why shouldn't they have mine?* Sharing my phone number seems like such a little thing, but it was a big step of trust and faith on my part. *If they have my number, will I receive irate phone calls during the evenings? Do I want to talk to parents after my work day is through? Will parents abuse the offer? Wait, wait! I trust my friends with my phone number. There's never*

any doubt that they won't use it responsibly; besides, I like to hear from them. If I'm going to establish an open community here, I have to open the door or it will never happen. I began including my home phone number on every piece of correspondence and later also added the easiest times to reach me during the school day and at home.

Sharing my phone number didn't create a landslide of abusive phone calls. Those who did call really wanted to talk about a concern. Welcoming parents to call me when it's convenient for them shows respect for them as people.

Families also know where I live. One summer evening, Chuck and his dad, John, drove in the driveway. I went out to greet them.

"Hi, Terri. I hope we aren't interrupting."

"Not at all. Come in."

"Actually, we're on a mission. Chuck, since this is your idea, you can ask."

"Mrs. A., could I chop down two pieces of your diamond willow to make walking sticks for my grandparents? They're coming to visit next month."

"Sure. You might want to go a ways from the house to find good pieces. How did you know I have diamond willow?"

"I saw some in your house. Then I found the trees during our camp out. Thanks."

"Thanks, Terri. Chuck, you head out that direction and I'll bring the saw."

Chuck sawed, his father held the trees, and I watched from the porch. We talked a few minutes more and they left. *I liked that. I liked having them drop by as other friends do.*

Communication

I had elements of communication already in place with the family letter and the take home journal, but now with a focus on building community, I forced myself to reexamine these practices and create new ones as well.

I changed the home visits to focus on the parents along with the child. Last year, I composed a handwritten note to each parents and mailed it separately from the student letter.

Dear Alice and Joe,

I'm going to start out using first names. I want them to use mine so I'll model. Besides I want this letter to be very friendly.

Your son, Rick, is going to be in my sixth-grade classroom. I'm excited about working with him this year.

Rick will be our initial common ground.

I'm also looking forward to knowing you. I would like to stop by to meet you on Wednesday sometime between 6:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m. I'm visiting other families that night also, so I'm unsure about the precise time. I want them to realize that I'm visiting all the families in the class. This will start people phoning to find out who the other class members are.

I just got back from a summer in England, so I'd love to hear what summer was like here in Fairbanks.

I want them to know something about me and it also provides a conversational opening if we need one.

See you Wednesday,

Terri Austin

I'll use my whole name this time since this is our first contact.

479-1234

Here goes, my phone number.

P.S. If there is a conflict with the day or time, please give me a call so we can reschedule a time together.

I'll provide options. If there is a conflict or concern we can settle it together—our first problem-solving activity as a partnership.

This mental change in the approach to home visits really illustrates my growth and understanding of my desired values of community and relationships with parents.

It came from continually questioning my actions, deep reflection on my observations, and a frequent rummaging into what I believed were my values.

During the home visits, I consciously made the effort to talk with parents as well as the child. In the past, my sole purpose was to meet the student, but now it included the parents. During our conversation, I invited the parents (and family) to a picnic at my house. "This is your personal invitation to you and your family to come to my house, since you allowed me to come to yours. I would like you to see where I live, too." I passed out maps and gave verbal directions to my home. Everyone seemed enthusiastic about the picnic.

As a result of my new knowledge, I made other changes in communication patterns. I sent home an "Information Survey," offering choices in ways to stay in weekly contact. The survey options included the take home journal, a phone call, or another suggestion of their choice. In this same survey, I asked if parents wanted the family letter to be handwritten or typed. My classroom is based on choices. I need to offer choices to parents as well, but choices aren't easy to offer. I see the value of the take home journal; I know that at the end of the year, the parents treasure the journal. How do I convey this idea to parents who are just beginning the year? The teacher part of me would rather dictate than offer choice. Twenty-five of the twenty-seven parents wanted to correspond through the take home journal. The other two set days and times for phone calls. The majority of the parents selected a handwritten family letter over one that's typed.

The family letters changed also.

Hi,

How was your weekend? Saturday I caught up on school work and yesterday I wrote. Ken and I managed to squeeze in a walk with the dogs. The trees are beautiful. I hope they last until Friday.

It's important that the parents know about me and my life. From now on, I'll include a paragraph about events with my family.

The sleep-over is THE topic of conversation in this room. Please remind your child to wear warm clothing. We'll be outside both days, and it's easy to get chilled. Also, please only send the items on the list.

It's only a two-day, one-night trip. Each child should have one sleeping bag and one clothing bag.

Ken and I divided up the food. Thanks for volunteering to help out. Please send the food with your child on Thursday. If you have any questions, give me a call. We'll be focusing on environmental studies while we're there. Thank you for your support of this trip. The friendship we build over those two days will be the foundation for our entire year.

Praise is important. Parents need to hear it, too.

I loved seeing all of you at the Open House. There's always so much to talk about and never enough time.

Parents need to hear how much I enjoy being with them. Maybe that will encourage more parents to attend school functions.

Have a terrific week!

Terri

479-1234

I'll use my first name only, since that's how I want them to address me, and, of course, my phone number.

Dates to Remember:

Thursday & Friday, Sept. 15 & 16—Trip to Mrs. A's home. Remember to check the supply list. Rain ponchos are a must. Rain is predicted!

In a similar fashion, I changed my notes in the take home journals. They became more informal, and chattier, and I placed more emphasis on finding common ground with the parents. Through these conversations, I learned about goals, new babies, job transfers, divorces, frustrations of living with a twelve-year-old, fears of being in Alaska for the first winter, homesickness, and military life. And I shared my

continual struggle with writing, favorite movies, past Alaskan adventures, descriptions of places I've visited, books, and stories about my family. *When I'm open and willing to share, most parents are, too.* **Being a teacher implies a very restricted way of acting. I can change the boundaries if I'm willing to take risks and be creative.**

One boundary I wanted to change was the dreaded "call from the teacher". I borrowed the idea of "care calls" from Charlotte Schwartz, a third-grade teacher in my building. In September and October, I called two parents per night to make positive comments about their child. *The care calls will make me talk with every single parent about something good. This may help them feel more comfortable calling me in the future.* The care calls were highly effective. The parents were delighted to hear from a teacher who wanted to share something wonderful about their child rather than talking about something that needed fixing.

Consensus

In comparison to the classroom, the parents and I were never together for a long enough period to really identify who we were as a group. But as a community of two (the parent and myself) we continued to learn about each other through the family letters, take home journals, and phone calls.

I found more opportunities to offer choices to parents. I sent home surveys asking when they would like the next family night to occur. I asked about their preference for the time and date of musical performances, and if they wished me to make a home visit before school ended. With each choice offered, more parents responded.

Challenges

I'm always astonished by the traffic in Anchorage. As we get nearer to the city, the road changes from a two-lane to a four-lane and then to a large, divided highway with a variety of exit signs. I often get in the wrong lane and have to maneuver my way out. I have to take deep breaths, keep my sight on my destination, and keep going.

Being Together

My first "deep breath" challenge was the family picnic. I wanted the parents to meet each other and to begin to view themselves as a part of this classroom group. I

also wanted the parents to see where I live. *I learn so much about the people by visiting the homes. I'd like to give the parents the same opportunity. But can I do this by myself? I'm not a wonderful hostess. I don't cook and I don't like elaborate preparations. If I'm going to do this, it will have to be simple and easy.* I decided to have a potluck picnic on the back porch. If the weather was rainy, we would move inside. I scheduled the picnic a week after school began so that any new families would have the opportunity to join us. I wrote about the picnic events in my journal:

> Nine families came for the picnic. That's a little over a third, so that's pretty good, I think. I asked them to bring a food that begins with the first letter of their last name, so we had Wilson watermelon, Williams wheat bread, Tucker tacos, Miller macaroni and cheese, etc. It was fun and we had lots of food. After eating, I decided to let the kids play—to form their community—and the adults would play the game and form ours.
>
> The game required the adults to find out who had a relative over ninety, find the person with the largest shoe size, etc. When we began, I asked them to only use a name once. They groaned, then they began. The whole back porch was filled with laughter and writing. The game finally resulted in a community effort. "Who has a famous relative?" someone would shout out. All would respond with their findings. That really ended our evening. I gathered up the pens—they wanted to keep them, but then I said that I "borrowed" them from school and they all went "oooooooh" like I was in big trouble. It was nice that they could tease me. At 7:40 p.m., I ended the evening since I promised that we would all be on our way by 8:00 p.m. It was 8:30 p.m. before the forest was quiet again. Before they left, they wanted to know when we would get together again. We have Open House this Thursday, so we'll decide then. It will be a group effort.

The picnic turned out better than I imagined. The parents obviously enjoyed talking with each other, since I had to force them to leave. It's nice to hear them ask about wanting to get together again. The picnic was a success!

Open House followed the picnic three days later. I purposely did not plan a scheduled talk for the evening. *OK, if I'm modeling my interactions with parents after*

my beliefs I hold for the classroom, then tonight's the real test. No formal talk. I have a few ideas, but we'll talk together. During the day, I wanted to write an agenda, but forced myself not to write anything. *Here they come. I'll just offer a few opening remarks and let them take it from there.* I talked briefly about my expectations for myself and the students and sat down. The parents began asking questions directed to me and to other parents. The discussion was an interesting mixture of finding out about the curriculum (from me) and checking about adolescent behavior (from other parents). **I wasn't the only authority in the room; the parents obtained needed information from other parents as well as me. This is just what I strive for with the students. Now the parents were enacting my goal.**

Coming Together

During Open House, the parents and I planned our next gathering. We decided to meet again in October for a "family night". Janelle McCrackin (1994), a fellow teacher researcher, created the idea of family nights for her classroom of first graders. Once a month, Janelle invited six families to come to school to explore a specific theme, like bread, bananas, or water. I borrowed her idea of families coming to school, but invited all the families and planned the evening around one segment of the curriculum.

Just like my picnic, this needs to be low key. I want families to come and enjoy themselves, but I want my preparation time to be minimal. I don't want to be in charge. My purpose is provide another opportunity for parents to feel comfortable in school, spend time with their families, meet other families, and spend time with me. This has got to be simple or I'll never continue.

In October, we had art family night. We met in the art room. Soft music played in the background. As the ten families gathered around the tables, I explained each of the seven art areas. "You can do them all or spend the evening on one art project. It's up to you and your family. Each project is designed so that every member of your family can participate. If you have a question, let me know. Otherwise, let's begin." We spent the hour blowing paint bubbles, constructing paper hamburgers, and fingerprinting designs while talking or singing to the music. Families freely talked with the other families at their tables and easily moved from one area to the other. They shared ideas and techniques among and between families.

At the end of the evening, the students cleaned the art room while I invited the parents to return to the classroom for a chat. *I'd like to provide a time for parents to*

talk. This seems like an ideal time. Once seated and nibbling cookies, Kathy began the conversation with her concerns about her daughter. "Diane seems to be changing into this strange creature. Does anyone else have this problem?" Everyone nodded and started talking. *Ending the family night with a "parents time only" section worked out well. We don't often get to see each other without the children around.* Twenty minutes later, students wandered in, and we set the dates for the November science family night, and the January math family night.

The other events that brought families together were our classroom performances. On these nights, families crowded into the commons area or the school with video cameras running. I especially enjoyed the time after the performance ended. *I love to see the families staying to talk. My students are so tired they collapse on the floor. The younger brothers and sisters run up and down the steps and the parents form conversation groups scattered here and there. A few men are talking to Ken about the merits of particular cameras, and some of the women are discussing the logistics of fund raising. Others are easily moving from group to group. Would this have happened without the picnic and the family night events?* **There are two reasons for me to plan student performances. The first is for the self-esteem of the students. The other is to allow for interaction between the parents.**

In April, one parent wanted to meet and talk with other parents about adolescent behavior. During our phone conversation, she told me, "We'll have it at school one evening. You need to tell parents to come. This is important." *I don't tell parents to come to anything. I can offer opportunities, but I don't tell.* I offered to send out a survey to see if anyone was interested, and if they were, there would be no problem in meeting in the classroom. Eight families responded. On the night of the meeting, Ken and I brought sodas and waited. The mother requesting the meeting showed up, but no one else did. *Eight families were interested, but none of them came. Was the topic not important enough? Was it on the wrong night or wrong time? It's close to the end of school, is everyone tired? Too involved in softball or soccer practice?* **I work to create new opportunities for the growth of the parent community, but just when I think I understand, something happens that reminds me to continue to be observant and flexible while working with parents.**

Celebrations

We're almost to Anchorage! I can see the tops of the ARCO building and the Captain Cook Hotel straight ahead. Off to the left, I can almost see the parking for the Northway Mall.

I understood the importance of celebrating with students, and felt it would be important to do with parents. It proved to be a challenge because we weren't often together. I tried to find creative ways to honor them. Periodically in all the take home journals, I would add stickers or an ink stamp to brighten up a page. Because of the exclusive conversations with each parent in the take home journal, I could be an avid supporter of whatever was happening in their lives. I cheered for Nancy when she discovered she was accepted in a master's degree program for nursing. I encouraged Ann when she heard word that she was hired for a long-sought-after position and was nervous about returning to work. I congratulated new fathers and couples celebrating anniversaries. **I celebrated more on an individual basis with parents than as a total group.**

As a type of final celebration, I wanted to meet individually with my parents one more time before school is done. Home visits—I could offer to visit any family who would like a final visit. Choices continue! In my final survey of the year, I offered to make a visit. I have no specific agenda, I'm interested in seeing what we'll talk about. The family could choose the day and the time during the second week in May. Eight families requested a visit.

On Monday, I began with Jennifer's family. My journal entry for that day says:

> It was rather a strange visit. They invited me in, offered a chair at the table, and then proceeded to work in the kitchen. They ignored me for a few minutes. Then they "struck." They sat on either side of me and proceeded to tell me that it was my fault that Jennifer didn't like school this year. . . . I spent forty-five minutes listening to both of them tell me how hard they are working with her and she's still not improving. I had a sore neck from looking back and forth. We ended with a request to see her grades and my promise to send them home with Jennifer the next day. I briefly saw Jennifer as she came into the kitchen to get a glass of water. Her face was red and I think she was embarrassed that I

was there. She was definitely not the Jennifer of school. I left feeling run over.

The visit wasn't the most positive way to begin the home visits. Will they all be like this one? I could barely find room to jump into the conversation. Actually it was a conversation between the two parents, and I was the audience. Her parents write in the take home journal regularly, they've attended family nights and other school events, plus they have my phone number, and this is first I've heard of this. I hope the other visits are better. I'm worried.

On Wednesday, I visited three homes. All three families reminded me of my visit to Jesse's. They were all quite casual in attitude to my visit. I entered their family life easily. In Kim's house, her younger sister finished her homework in the living room while the parents and I talked around her. The TV stayed on, showing the final minutes of a basketball game, while Brian's family and I chatted about England. In Diane's home, the family cat snuggled onto my lap. *This is more like it. These give me the same feeling of comfortableness that I had when I visited Jesse's family.*

On Thursday, two families canceled, one because of a last minute change in plans, the other because the daughter was sick. So that left Ray. I recorded the events of the visit in my journal:

> Donna opened the door and said, "Why don't you say hello to Raymond, while he eats his dinner?" I peeked in the dining room, waved at Ray eating with his three sisters, and followed Donna into the living room. I commented on her large fish, we chatted about the weather, gardening, and landscaping. By that time, Ray joined us. During our conversations, Ray went out from time to time to move the sprinkler and talk with Ken, who was waiting for me in the car. Donna asked about Ken's work and said there was an opening for a plumber at the hospital on post. She had Ray fetch her briefcase, so that she could give me the number to call. She even gave me the name of the person to contact. I left with the paper and the admonition to "have Ken call first thing in the morning."

With the exception of Jennifer's visit, they were great. While school issues were mentioned, it was a very minimal part of the conversation. The families seemed

quite at ease with me in their home, and like our picnic, I didn't see any grand preparation for my visit. *This was a great way to end the year. I wish more families had signed up for this. I wonder how I can encourage this next year?*

Reflections

As I sit in my favorite Anchorage spot, watching individual birds soar and dip over the ocean then settle in flocks on the beach, I wonder if I've made any progress in forming a community of parents. *I've come to realize that I value easy and open relationships with each parent. I've learned that the individual is important, and just as I make each student feel valuable and wanted, I also need to do that with parents. I've created opportunities for this type of interaction using the welcoming notes, home visits, care calls, and the weekly take home journals. I've also tried to foster a larger feeling of belonging to a special group of parents through the family letter, the picnic, classroom invitations, performances, and family nights.* **This is like having two classrooms, one for sixth graders and one for parents.** *No matter how informal I tried to make every activity, it all adds up to an incredible amount of work. The persistent question that is always in the back of my mind is: Is it worth it? Is the payoff worth the effort? It is if I'm willing to accept the fact that some parents never will become part of the community. I can offer many different kinds of opportunities and try to make it easier for parents to join, but I can only offer. The parents must make an effort too.* **I can't create a community by myself.**

CHAPTER 5

BUILDING COMMUNITY: A TANGLE OF BOUNDARIES FACILITATING A SCHOOL COLLEAGUE COMMUNITY

Note to the Reader

This chapter recounts my work with my teaching colleagues. It opens with a description of my neighborhood and then moves into a description of the "neighborhood" within Richardson Elementary School.

I share how I enter this partially formed neighborhood of the school with a personal agenda of creating a professional learning community.

The major portion of the chapter is devoted to the application and adaptation of the five community elements of climate, communication, consensus, challenges, and celebrations in a weekly university credit class setting.

Also in this chapter I realize the difference in working with adults in a nonclassroom setting and the difference in my role. I use the tension I experience to gain a new understanding about working with a community rather than constructing one.

Each year in September, I bring my sixth-grade students out to my house for a two-day overnight camping trip. After stowing our sleeping bags in the garage, we grab our backpacks and head for the woods for an all-day hike. As we walk through my rural neighborhood to reach the path, my students often make comments about the houses they see.

"Hey, look at that, they have grass on their roof."

"Watch out! Can goats bite?"

"Why doesn't somebody make them clean up their yard?"

Since the majority of them have only lived on a military base where everything is kept as uniform as possible, they are surprised at the variety found at each home site. Every home in my neighborhood is quite different. Fred's house is neatly hidden from the road since it's built into a northern sloping hill. Neighbors stop and ponder the meaning and use of his neatly trimmed snow pea hedge outlining the front perimeter of his land. Down the corner from Fred's house stands Al and Robin's small plywood home. Against the advice of everyone in the neighborhood, they built in a small hollow on a south-facing slope. Each spring, they have to shovel the snow out of their yard to keep from being flooded. Then up on the corner there is Jack's house, which would fit into any midwestern suburban community. It's painted a soft colonial blue with neat white trim and surrounded by shaped trees, manicured lawn, and a sandbox and swing set tucked away in the back corner of their lot. We shake our heads in wonder as to why Jack would want to spend the short summers riding his tractor lawn mower and pulling weeds while swatting mosquitoes. Directly across from Jack's is George's cabin. George's cabin is as rugged as Jack's house is urban. The small log cabin has grass on the roof, two rooms, mismatched windows, and the whole thing looks like it was assembled by a five-year-old playing with Lincoln Logs. The yard is littered with an ultralight airplane, a couple of empty dog houses (the dogs elect to sleep under the porch), a pile of logs dumped in an open clearing, an old rusted pickup truck, and a few goats. George's yard is a source of delight for the neighborhood children and a topic of complaint for the adults.

My neighborhood is typically Alaskan and is a wonderful example of the tension commonly found in northern communities. It's the struggle between individualism and acceptance. Because of its "last frontier" reputation, Alaska tends to attract people who somehow don't fit into conventional society; either their strong opinions alienate them from a community or they have such a strong sense of personal freedom that it creates problems. In most cases, these people have very

definite views concerning every issue and are quite willing to share them with everyone. George is always eager to explain why he should be able to use the road in front of our house as a landing strip for his ultralight and his continual fight with the government for his freedom to do so. We all told Al and Robin not to build there, but they insist the view is perfect and will be an asset if they decide to sell their home.

And yet, there is also the spirit of welcoming, of inviting others into the community. All of us built our homes at the same time, and we knew we could rely on each other. All helped position the last two rows of logs on Dick and Kathy's cabin, all helped dig Al and Robin's basement, everyone helped us put up our roof trusses. In our own homes, we may grumble and heartily disagree with our neighbors' opinions, yet we put up with each other because we value our personal freedom and reject any attempts at standardization. My neighborhood is a community where a bit of tolerance mixes with a great deal of personal individualism.

Richardson Elementary is my teaching neighborhood, and it too is a community where some tolerance is mixed with strong feelings of individualism. As the newest school in the district, the members of the staff first met each other two years ago in the Officer's Club meeting rooms. *Wow, there are a lot of us. I count forty teachers and still more are coming in. I know about twenty-eight of these people, and we're all very different. Wonder what's going to happen as we try to open this new school? I hope Donna (the principal) has a plan.* Over tea and coffee, we systematically shared our names, past teaching positions, and our new position at Richardson. *I can tell from the cautious looks and guarded voices that we are all sizing each other up. I think we are all thinking the same thing: can we work together, especially within the grade levels?*

The opening of the new school in August didn't allow for much time for getting acquainted. We had three days in which to be ready for students. We all worked in a frenzy: moving in, setting up individual classrooms, drawing traffic patterns, distributing equipment. The first year at Richardson Elementary was a blur, and I didn't take a breath and really examine the community aspect of the school until spring. I realized that I wanted to be a member of a professional community within the school in which I worked. *I long for a place where adults considered themselves active curious learners; where readings, discussions, and practices shape our decisions; where reflection is a natural part of our teaching lives. We would all want to be there because of the caring, thinking, and enthusiasm.*

I began to consider the possibility of facilitating such a community at Richardson Elementary. Could I create a professional community that would be inviting to all members of the building? Could I use the knowledge I've gained in working with my sixth graders to create a professional neighborhood that would enable the inhabitants, including me, to examine their structural practice and theory?

The Wednesday Class

Senge, Roberts, Ross, Smith & Kleiner (1994) capture my intention for this Wednesday community with the Zulu greeting. Loosely translated it means "A person is a person because of other people" (3). I had visions of a school community as an opportunity to not only explore our actions, but a place to recognize each other as valuable colleagues. Wheatley and Kneller-Rogers (1998) point out the increasing likelihood of working next to a person and not ever knowing them. I found this quite easy to do in such a large school and with the demands teaching imposed. I was hoping this class might provide a place for genuine mutual respect and friendship to develop.

Beginning Professional Conversations

An opportunity arose when Jane Noble, the student placement advisor from the University of Alaska Fairbanks, approached our school looking for preservice teacher placement for the fall of 1994. She wanted the preservice teachers not only to do their methods work at Richardson but also to student teach there. In other words, five preservice university students would be in the building for the entire year. *Is there a way I could use this situation to help create that professional community? I've wanted to offer a one-credit class for teachers in this building. We could meet one day a week after school for the semester. If we only met for an hour, it wouldn't be mental overload. Plus it would be right here in this building—no going out in the cold, so that wouldn't be an excuse for not attending. We could all read the same article and then discuss it. The class would be low key, no pressure, like a baby step into the world of reading, writing, and reflection. Could I tie in the preservice teachers as well? Could I require the university students to attend? That would guarantee at least five people in the class.* I talked with Jane Noble and with my principal and sent the following message over e-mail the following day:

Hi,

Are you interested in a method student or student teacher? We have some available to us this year. Responsibilities include time to work with them before and after school, time to help them grow in teaching ability, and time to attend a credit class once a week here in the building. [*Wonder if anyone will notice this little requirement? Will it keep anyone away?*] The class will be based on a common reading (done outside of class) and discussion. You will need to keep a journal, but class time will be allotted for that. I see it as a relaxing time when we can all get together and talk. *I hope this is gentle and reassuring. I want people to not be scared in coming.* E-mail me back if you are interested.

Terri

I need to make sure this message is clear and nonthreatening. I don't want it to seem like I'm the holder of knowledge. I want them to feel that this gathering is a mutual coming together. Realizing the limitations of e-mail, I visited each team leader, chatted, and left a written outline about the class and information about our method students. Each team leader agreed to share the information with his or her grade level team that week. Fifteen teachers responded! *This is pretty incredible. I thought there would be some resistance to this idea. But we only have five university students; I'll need to talk to Jane Noble about placement. I wonder if I could create a class that could include even the teachers who don't have university students to participate. Then these other teachers could be part of the group as well.* I saw this as my opportunity to begin to develop a professional community. Over the weekend, I wrote a course description:

Professional Conversations: Dialogue for Growth

Course Description:
The purpose of this class is to allow cooperating teachers, method students, student teachers, and other educators to join together to form

a reflective educational community within Richardson Elementary School. Participants will come to each Wednesday meeting with observations, questions, and concerns seen within each individual classroom. Examining personal teaching practice will be a consistent topic. The text will provide a theoretical guide to broad educational issues that will provide the base for discussions in the Wednesday meetings. This class is purposely designed to give support to both the cooperating teacher and the university student.

I now had the setting and purpose for a community. Could I foster a professional community by adapting my classroom elements of climate, communication, consensus, challenges, and celebrations to this particular gathering of colleagues? *I'm really excited about this. I can't wait to begin the Wednesday class. I have visions of great conversations, changes in our thinking and practice, much laughter, and a united spirit. It's going to be wonderful! But I also realize that I can't make this so different that it will make people uneasy. I can't rush.* **This class can't be George's Lincoln Log house, nor can it be Jack's suburban house. It has to be a new structure that we all build together that will take us from what exists now to all the possibilities ahead.**

I received an e-mail message shortly after I shared information about the class which reminded me of the importance of seeing the participants of individuals. This episode caused me to consider what I did in my classroom to reassure my students in new situations.

Terri,

I'm interested in the class. What are the requirements?

Alexis

I thought everything was on the information paper. Maybe she misplaced hers. I replied.

Alexis,

I've tried to keep it meaningful but very simple for all of us. You've had a method student before, so you know the time commitment there. In addition, you'll have a short chapter to read before coming to class. During the class, we'll write in our journals and then discuss the readings. That's it! I'm glad you're going to be part of the class.

Terri

The next day after school, Alexis came to my room with a questioning look on her face. "Tell me about this journal stuff. How much do we have to write?"

Her tone of voice told me she needed my full attention now. I put down my journal. "Alexis, it's really rather a short writing time. We'll begin with a five minute writing time and then we'll end with another five minutes of writing." *She's really worried about this. Wonder why? I thought it was very straightforward.*

"You're sure that's it?"

"Honest, that's all." *She must be worried about hidden requirements.*

"Okay, I want to take this class, you know. I just want to know what I have to do."

Does she want it to be difficult as a reason for not taking the class? Or is she afraid she won't be able to keep up? Or is she afraid that she'll have to read her writing out loud to the class? I wonder if she's ever done any reflective writing or participated in a discussion type of class? Alexis is vocal. If she's saying all this, the others must be thinking it. I care for these people and want them to feel comfortable and at ease. I need to be very visible tomorrow, so people can stop me and ask questions. I'll be in the office area in the morning, eat in the lounge, and casually walk the halls after school.

The next afternoon, Alexis appeared in my room again. "Okay, I think I can handle the journal stuff, but do I have to write a paper or something at the end of the course?"

"No, Alexis." *We need to review the course outline together.* Pulling out the course information, I directed her attention the section marked "Evaluation." "Let's go over these together. Here, have a seat. Have a piece of apple. Evaluation is based on attendance, the discussions, and the journal. At the end of the class, you turn in

your journal. No paper, no project. Just come, talk, and write in your journal." *What can I say to help her feel more confident?*

"What if I don't have anything to write about?"

Her concerns are so similar to my sixth graders. She needs as much reassurance as they do. "Then describe the room, write about your day. You'll find you have lots to write about. It will get easier each time."

"What if you don't like what I write?"

Ah ha, is this the problem? "Alexis, I'm not a judge. The writing is for you, not me. I just want to provide time for you to write."

"Okay, if you're sure. Then I'll take the class, but I don't want to write a paper or anything."

If this is an indication of the feelings concerning this class, I need to move very gently, to be very reassuring and to view everything as fragile. What am I getting into here? **I totally underestimated the courage it required for some teachers to participate in this class, and in my enthusiasm completely lost sight of the individual. It took me time to fully understand Alexis's concerns. I now realize my interactions with Alex can be compared to my home visits to my sixth graders. I want every person entering the classroom to feel cared for and wanted.**

As I planned for this class, I explored the field of business for ideas in creating community. Since reading *In Search For Excellence* (Peters & Waterman, Jr., 1982), early in my career and recognizing the similarities of practice of successful companies and the National Writing Project, I periodically reviewed the current literature for practices I might "borrow" for my professional use. Because of my interest in community and my values of respect for the individual, I looked for companies that valued the individual and didn't employ a "top-down" model. I specifically looked for ways creative and innovative businesses built an identifiable culture. This included ways to build a comfortable environment, establish communication, and create identity.

Climate

I learned the importance of the environment from establishing communities with my sixth graders. I knew where we met would help set the tone for what would follow, so I set out to create a space where community could happen (Senge, Roberts, Ross, Smith, Kleiner, 1994). Over and over again in *Search of Excellence* (Peters &

Waterman, Jr. (1982) and then in *A Passion for Excellence* (Peters & Austin, 1985), the authors point out the importance of recognizing human needs during the work cycle. I thought carefully about our needs as educators and as individuals as I looked for a place to gather.

I wanted the room to be like my classroom, bright and welcoming, but it proved harder than I expected. *For me this is the easiest place to begin. We need to have a relaxed atmosphere, grown up chairs, and food.* I walked through the school, looking for a plot of land on which to build our new structure. *We could meet in my room. I like it. It's bright, it's relatively clean at the end of the day, and it contains all the elements of climate that I value in establishing community. It would be so easy to invite everyone in. I wouldn't have to carry things. The major drawback is that it is MY room. We need a more neutral place, and my conversation with Alexis reinforces that idea.* **I have to be willing to make personal compromises for the consideration of each individual and for the potential development of the overall community.** *The staff lounge is too busy at the end of the day. I want the conversation to be different from the lunchroom variety. The library is nice and comfy, but too many teachers come in and out after school. Besides, it's too big. We wouldn't be able to hear each other. We would have to rearrange the tables. That might be a problem for the librarian. An empty classroom? Too stark. It looks like a jail cell. I could fix it up, but I don't have the time. I'll only use it if I can't find some place else. The conference room is the principal's domain. The research room is the final possibility. It's neutral territory. It's small enough to feel cozy, but of a comfortable size. The chairs and tables are conducive to prolonged conversation. I'll need to come in each week to remove the books from the tables and put back on the shelf. This looks like the best possibility.* **This class is like taking my students to my house for the two-day overnight experience. For that, I needed a place where students could leave their ideas of school behind. While I can't take the teachers to a hotel, the actual meeting room for this class needs to carry no connotation of prior meetings, events, or personal territory. We are beginning, not continuing.**

The first class! As soon as my sixth graders left, I flew to the research room, my arms full of bags of homemade popcorn, paper bowls, napkins, and a tape recorder. I quickly reshelved books left on the tables, straightened each bookshelf, and cleared the smaller tables along the wall. I wanted the whole room to look neat and tidy. I moved and shoved large tables in a long rectangle and pulled fifteen padded

chairs up to the table. *Oh, no! The time! I want everything to be ready when they walk through the door.* Emptying handfuls of popcorn in the bowls, I scattered the small bowls along the length of the table. *I've got enough popcorn for twice this many. I always overdo it, but it looks like so little in my kitchen.* Napkins in between the bowls. *I hope they bring their own drinks. Everyone usually heads for the juice and soda machine after school. We may start late if they need to go to get something.* The tape recorder was next. Back to the room to find the right music, soft and restful, but lively to keep us all awake. Back to the research room to begin the music and turn the lights low. OOPS, back to the room to pick up the afternoon's agenda and my journal. Now I was ready. I sat and waited. *Would they really come? Fifteen people said they would, but would they really? Will they all be as nervous as Alexis? I know I am. I really want this to work, not only for them, but for me. I won't have another chance if this class doesn't go. What if they forget it is today? I better have the secretary make an announcement over the intercom.* I zoom to the office and back again. When I return, three teachers are sitting munching popcorn, not talking with each other, but there! More people wander in, and after a few minutes we begin.

That was my pattern every Wednesday. **I recreated the climate each week with minor variations.** I discovered that the long rectangular table arrangement didn't work. It was difficult to see others sitting on the same side of the table. I changed the arrangements to a large square with an open space in the center. Visually this gave us more room, and it proved to be easier to converse. Even though the research room had no windows to the outside, the lighting tended to vary according to the weather. As the daylight outside decreased, more lights felt comfortable. The soft lively music and food continued to be consistent essential elements.

I really wanted the teachers to feel cared for when they came to class. There were days when we could all have used a long soak in a hot tub, but that was out of my ability to provide. I wanted to provide the best for them because they took the risk of participating in the class. I wanted to give them all the support that I could. **This is all a modeling process. I'm modeling climate for the principal and all the staff meetings. I'm modeling a caring and gentle atmosphere for the teachers and their own students. I realize I have larger ambitions than creating a community within the participants of the Wednesday class. I'm hoping my efforts will be picked up and tried in other areas within the school.**

Communication

Before Ken and I began the construction of our house, I created a picture of the completed structure in my mind. I knew it would be a barn shape, and it would be painted yellow with white trim. I find that whenever I begin something new, I create a mental picture of the finished product. It's the ideal. For this class, I knew exactly how it would begin. *As each teacher enters, she would move to a place at the table and would begin to write in her journal. This writing time would not only allow the teachers some reflective time, but would provide some flexible time before beginning the discussion since I know not everyone will arrive at the same time. Use every minute wisely! Besides, if people enter a room full of people writing it will set the tone for ALL to write.*

After writing, discussion begins. Every single teacher eagerly talks about the assigned reading and relates it to his or her personal teaching experiences. We gain energy and ideas from the lively exchange. After reluctantly ending our discussion, we write a final entry in our journals and then leave, still talking about the ideas shared in class.

A week or so before the class actually began, I lay awake at night and considered all the possibilities. My nights were filled with my communication—self talk. I worked to create a meaningful and interesting class that would encourage community. I drew on all my previous experience and then created new ideas as I mentally constructed possible solutions to every problem I could conceive. *We only have an hour together. How can I best structure the time together to allow community to take root and grow? They don't need to hear from me as much as they need to hear from each other. It would be rather fun to respond to their journals, but I don't think this group is ready for that yet. So no response. We need routine. Something steady that each person can count on. As we gain personal voice and confidence, we can deviate, but in the beginning there should be no surprises. I think the writing is going to be the hardest part. The only way to do it is to jump in and do it. Wonder what I do if they don't write? What do I do in my class? I write anyway, I model, model, and continue to model. Okay, if something like that happens, just think about the sixth graders. I sure hope I know what I'm doing here. There's so much we could gain from this experience.*

Beginning the Conversation

The first class is always the hardest for me and the participants. We need something positive and fun to help us all relax. Cartoons! I copied a variety of cartoons, one for each participant, and wrote a short message of welcome on each one.

These were waiting at each place on the table when everyone arrived. *It's nice to hear the chuckles and see the grins as they share their cartoons and read their neighbors'. This was a good idea. I can see everyone relaxing a bit.* I continued the cartoons for several weeks. After the first class, I used my short message written on the cartoons to welcome the participants and remind them of our opening routine of writing in journals.

Hi,

It's great to be together again. I'm looking forward to our conversation. Let's begin by writing in our journals.

Terri

Journal Writing

From my work with my sixth graders, I realized it would be helpful to create some type of transition as the teachers shifted from the demands of the classroom into the conversation of the Wednesday class. I immediately thought of journal writing. It can be an open-ended activity, it doesn't require my direct instruction so teachers could begin whenever they joined the class, and most important to me, it might provide a basis for discussion and inquiry (Holly, 1989). *The weekly journal write might also encourage some teachers to keep a reflective journal, a possible step toward teacher research. It might also influence some of the participants to include more writing in their classroom. It will be interesting to see how each teacher approaches this action.* With this vision in mind, I explained about writing in journals at the first meeting:

"We'll begin and end each class meeting with a journal write. It will be fairly short, only five minutes each time. It's an open type of writing, so you can write about whatever you wish."

"How long do you want it to be?"

"We'll write for five minutes and then stop. It's your writing, so during that time period, write until you're done."

"Do we skip lines or anything? Do you want it dated?"

"I find dating my entries helpful later, but it's all up to you."

"What do you want us to write about?"

"It's an open write, so the topic is up to you. It's your writing."

"I could write my grocery list?"

"It's up to you." I begin writing. *These were the very same questions my sixth graders ask.* Like the first writing day in my classroom and as Atwell (1987) recommends, I keep my head down and write. Only after a few minutes do I glance up to see how everyone is doing. Most are writing. One is playing with her pen, a few others are looking around and eating. The journal writing became our opening routine.

I used my journal in the same way. I would first write about my school day and gradually make the transition into focusing on the class. In October, I wrote:

> I'm so blank I can hardly write. It's been a long week. I'm hungry. I'm worn out. I'm glad that Lee is doing her methods work with me. It really helps to have another adult with another viewpoint, either supporting or differing. It was all I could do to come today! BUT take a deep breath and think about what I need to do here. Tonight we'll talk about empowering teachers. I want to share the idea of teacher research as empowerment.

This writing gives me time to shift my thinking from working with children to working with colleagues. Show energy and excitement so they'll be energized about the topic. Smile and relax.

After the first class, my vision concerning the journal as a transition routine didn't match what actually happened. First, each teacher would arrive in either of two ways, extremely quiet or very talkative. Either way, the teachers were not inclined to open their journal and begin to immediately write as soon as they sat down. After about the third class, I threw out my original vision and formulated a new one. *I see now that the teachers can't move from the high-pressure situation of the classroom to another very structured situation. Each class meeting is going to be different. We do need to write in our journals, but I need to be flexible.* **Reading and understanding**

the feelings and mood in the building during the day are important in deciding how the class needs to begin. My awareness is critical as I determine how much talk or how much quiet time we need before we are ready to move into the discussion section of the class.

So I developed a mental opening routine. I watched as the teachers entered the room. On one Wednesday afternoon, Paul comes in, puts his notebook down on the table, stretches out his legs, clasps his hand behind his head and closes his eyes. Donna hurries in, glances at the clock, and opens her note pad. As she reads, she reaches for a handful of crackers. Nancy enters laughing and talking to Susan. Susan's voice hides the music. Lee quietly takes a chair and watches everyone. Kate rushes in, only to rush out to find her notebook. Alexis teases Paul about being asleep. Lynn and Shelly enter quietly and find empty chairs. They continue to chat softly while Sandy opens her can of juice. How many come to listen to the music and not talk, and how many explode with words as they come through the door? I look at faces and posture and try to determine everyone's energy level. What are we able to handle tonight? **To be most effective, I need to make an effort to know these people as well as I know my sixth graders. I draw heavily on my experience in "reading" my classroom students and my previous informal observations of the teachers. The information I gained from Birdwhistell (1970), Goffman (1972), and Hall (1966) floods my mind as I sort out all the information each person is demonstrating.**

At 3:30 p.m., I begin to listen to the rise and fall of the conversation, and during a pause in the talk, I announce, "Shall we begin and write in our journals?" Gradually the talking ceases and journals open. *These people definitely don't respond to directions as quickly as my sixth graders. We only have an hour. I wish we would move a bit faster here. Hmmm, Christina is still talking to Beth. Not only is she not setting a good example, since Beth is a university student, but the talking is disrupting to the people around them. I'll just look up and see what happens. Beth saw me and winked. She'll be fine. I always have difficulty in balancing individual needs and the overall needs of the class. It's especially hard when these people are colleagues.* **I have no power here, only what they let me have, and I have to earn every bit. I continually learn. If I open myself to the situation, then I always find something new to consider.**

We continued to write in the journal at the beginning of each class, but it wasn't until during an interview at the end of the semester that I understood how the teachers felt about journal writing.

Shelly: I like that we come in and we have just a few minutes of reflective quiet time to separate ourselves from what happened in the classroom and to turn our focus around to something different.

Nancy: I'll follow up with the same. I enjoyed the journal writing too. I do like to write in a journal, but it comes on a very low priority in my busy life. I go, "Oh, yeah, I'll write," but then I don't. This gives me the time to really sit down and do it. And it's a scheduled time.

How wonderful! The writing did provide a transition just as I wanted.

Nancy: I was just reflecting and going back through it, and I was going, "Oh, I remember that day" or "Oh, that was a special day. Good." Just reading back on it is really rewarding, and it's just important to me. And I'm glad that we had the time to do that, the journal part.

Christina: For me coming on Wednesday night is like a slowing down time. All day long there's a million things going on in a million different directions. When I come in on Wednesday night, it's like my blood pressure is kind of high and so then when I have to reflect in the journal it kind of de-escalated, if there is such a word. It calms me down and by the end of the writing, I'm focused like Shelly was saying.

As shown in the interview, I was able to create a weekly opening routine that helped the teachers transition into a different setting. I also attempted to model physical support and space for personal expression. This demonstrates my respect and compassion for the participants as well as desire to build community through an attitude of nurturing (Shaffer & Anundsen, 1993).

Consensus

Meeting for one hour a week for fifteen weeks gave all of us an opportunity to know each other. Through our chats before the class began, the formal discussions, and the conversation after class, we began to see ourselves as part of a consistent group of fellow educators. In October, at the end of the eighth class meeting, I asked for volunteers who would be interested in being interviewed concerning the class. I wanted to find out how comfortable they had felt during the class and their perceptions of community within the class.

The following week, after most of the participants left and the room quieted, seven of us gathered at one end of the table to talk: Mary, a second-grade teacher; Alexis and Lynn, both kindergarten teachers; Mark and Tony, university preservice teachers working in third-grade classrooms; and Jane Noble, a university instructor and supervisor of the method students and student teachers.

Terri: Okay, I need to know from you . . .

Mary: Are you assessing us?

Terri: No. I'm looking at building community. How I do it in the classroom, how I do it with my teacher research group, how I do it here?

I was really struggling with this. I wanted to give them enough direction to get them started, but not enough to direct the conversation in any way. I finally gave up and just said what I wanted.

And I would like to know your thoughts. I have no specific questions, but would like to know your thoughts about how community has developed or not developed in here. I'm just going to listen. (I sat back in the chair to await what would develop.)

Alexis: Are you talking about this group that chose to take this class? There is definitely a community between the up-and-coming professionals, such as Mark, Christa, and Tony, and the ones who have been called "professionals" and are really working in the paying part of this job.

I never thought about two types of community. I saw us as one group.

Alexis: There is definitely a community growing there because the university students are having a chance to listen to our view.

Their insights help the "professionals" to see in new ways too. **So there are communities within communities. Does this happen elsewhere? In the Alaska Teacher Research Network, there are small groups of people who work and support each other and yet work within the larger group. In my classroom, I arrange the students in small supportive groups of four to handle the daily work and events. I never saw them in that way before.**

Alexis: For the most part teachers are saying exactly what they think, and that gives the student teachers a feel for what the professional world is like. So maybe there is a hierarchical community, as far as we are the ones who are experienced and they are the ones that will be in a while, so it's "not as bad as it looks" sort of thing. (Much laughter.) Maybe a stepping stone kind of thing.

So Alexis sees us modeling for the university students. I see that too. I'm glad others are aware of our role in that process. She didn't talk about a community with her fellow professionals, however.

Jane: I think of the things that really makes, and I'm an outsider, that makes me feel comfortable here and that is that it's all nonthreatening.

Jane, you aren't an outsider. You have been to every class and make such wonderful contributions. I wonder how I can help her see herself as a part of this group?

Jane: I mean, no one is casting value judgments, especially you (looking at me). You're certainly not saying "No, you can't say that" or "Would you rephrase that?" It's very easy to say what you really think. I, too, am delighted that the students are getting

to participate, because I see them getting something that other students are not getting. And that is collegiality, a professional collegiality.

We've just not had that feeling of professional collegiality in our building before. There was no catalyst for it. Maybe this class serves as a focal point, allowing teachers to participate in a professional forum.

Lynn: I think the best part is that we are allowed to disagree.

Allowed is an interesting word to use. What did I do to "allow" disagreement or give the sense that it's all right to disagree?

Lynn: And you can see that we have some very deep-seated feelings about—we come from very different value systems, have some very different ideas about what education is, and have very different ideas about how to conduct our personal lives. I think that one discussion, more than anything else, brought out some of the deep-seated differences we have, but we were able to disagree and still enjoy each other's company.

I remember thinking how wonderful that discussion was. As we discussed the moral ethics of teaching, it was evident that we disagreed on how our personal lives transferred into our professional lives. Some felt these were two distinctly different areas and had no relationship. Others felt that we bring our lives into the classroom and therefore must be privately moral and ethical as well as publicly. I felt we really touched on significant issues rather than talking about the surface aspect of teaching.

Lynn: For some reason, in the group, it never leaves you with any sort of bad feelings. You can just say, "I can disagree with you and that's okay, and I can have some deep-seated differences, but it doesn't have to engender bad feelings."

It never occurred to me that there might be bad feelings after the discussions. Our ideas about education reflect where we are in our educational growth. It's just where we are in the present time.

Mark: Well, I enjoy the discussions because you are saying that you wanted to establish community and I see this as part of a process, and the product is community. Because how you're going to facilitate the class is the first thing you did. In order to facilitate that, you fostered interaction. You created a forum in order to accomplish it.

I wonder if Mark is remembering the games we played during the first three classes. They were designed to get people to feel comfortable talking.

Mark: Secondly, you also had to set the boundaries. And in any community, there are certain boundaries. The boundaries were to listen, then to contribute, and then to allow agreement and disagreement.

Boundaries, what an interesting word. Is it like a fence that keeps people within a specific area, or is it like a mental parameter that allows people to only think in a certain way? What did I do exactly to set this up? I never remember saying "We all have to listen now." Does it come from modeling? The agreement and disagreement issue comes up again. It must be significant to the participants.

Mark: And once you established those boundaries, the people like myself who are very verbal . . . . It's important because it established listening as a very important part of it. So I see the whole process, and the community is the product.

Mary: I think . . . . It's that we're accepted as people and as professionals. We could talk and not monopolize or whatever.

Mark: Sure.

Mary: So that it's not a put-down or whatever. People are allowed to be. I like writing in here, "Oh, my goodness, what a day" (laughter). It allows you the time to do that, and that can't help but build

something. We're all saying the same thing. "Yes, I've been there, too." There are people who will sympathize and understand. And if that doesn't build community, I don't know what will.

Sharing experiences, whether past or present, helps the community to grow. It's the glue that helps hold us together.

Lynn: Empathy.

Mary: It sure is.

Jane: And you know so much of the literature says that it's important to be a reflective teacher. You want the teacher to be a reflective person, and I think indirectly this is a way to come together and reflect on what we're doing, what we're becoming, and what we hope to do.

One of my goals with this group was to model being a reflective practitioner.

Jane: And you're reflecting in an atmosphere where others are doing the same thing, so that you feel this community—the empathy as well as the excitement that builds when you and others happen upon ideas that you share as well.

Terri: *(I couldn't help myself, I had to jump in.)* One of the things that I really wanted to do with this class was that I wanted to provide, or buy teachers time. I wanted to somehow give them time to talk and interact with other professionals. Because we don't ever do that, and attaching a credit to it legitimizes it in some way. And so that was really one of the main purposes of this class, to buy all of you time to talk and think.

Tony: What I like out of it is just the interaction. Just being able to come in here and be able to say what's on my mind and have people listen. (Laughter.)

Tony's been struggling with getting the attention of his third graders.

Tony: And hear what I have to say.

This class gives him a place to explore ideas, a place to try them out.

Tony: And then I basically like what I walk away with. I like the ideas that you were talking about. I saw some of that show yesterday (a continuing series on cross-cultural communication). I like higher-level concepts, ideas, and stuff.

Jane: (Smiling) A philosophy major. . .

Tony: Yeah. The other thing is, I guess, back in the old days where you think about how communities were rooted, you had real specialization. Everybody was really specialized. Each person had their jobs within the community. You had the blacksmith, and then when someone needed to have shoes on their horses, they would go and talk to the person. They would have their conversation. Then you had the corner grocer. And just by talking, that's one of the fundamental roots of a community, just knowing the other people and just interaction.

Roots provide a strong picture of the role of communication within community. Without a healthy root system, the community bush won't flourish.

Tony: I'm used to hanging out in the college scene with a bunch of bozos. (Laughter.)

Mark: Wait a minute!

Tony: Well, you don't live in the dorms. But coming here is like a completely new world. I'm rubbing elbows with people who have made significant achievements in their lives and are real contributors to the community. It's a big step for me. I really like it.

We turned off the tape recorder and continued to chat for a minute or two and then wandered home. Driving home, I thought about our conversation. *Everyone has a different idea of community that is tied to his or her professional and personal needs. Tony uses the class to explore his new role as an educator, Alexis sees the*

class as a place to share expertise, Jane Noble views the class as a model of professional collegiality, Kate gains support through the writing and discussions, Mark looks at the underneath structure of the class to get a sense of purpose, and Lynn explores the openness of the dialogue to understand her colleagues. **The community, then, is like the ozone layer. It provides constant safety and continual coverage. The participants can take chances and risks, and the community allows for personal movement as the participants grow and change (Shaffer & Anundsen, 1993).**

If a stable, open community is formed, then the participants have the freedom and opportunity to use it as they are at that particular moment. The important factor is to construct a community that is open and flexible enough to accommodate the needs of the members and at the same time provide support in their individual efforts. It appears from the comments of these participants, I was able to create that type of community for these particular people.

In my vision of the Wednesday night class, I wanted all of us to feel comfortable, so that we could learn about each other through conversation. I did not expect talking to be a problem, but it was. My actions in response to the talking resulted in a tension in my ultimate goal of community. In my efforts to give equal talking opportunities to all, I also restricted some individuals in their normal discourse patterns. At this point in the class, I felt we were ready to handle the outward tension this might create and I felt I understood and could justify the dissonance that would grow within me. Intellectually I understand that some tension is good for community growth (Schmuck & Schmuck, 1992). Living through it proved to be another matter. As my journal entries demonstrate, I worried about the ultimate outcome for the community as a whole. Before the first class, I wrote in my journal:

> We'll have open discussion this week and see if everyone participates and no one dominates as happens in other school meetings. Then I'll assess for the next week.

The first class went as I expected. Some talked while others remained quiet and listened. After the second class, I wrote:

> This was our first week of actual discussion. I was wondering how it would go—would anyone take over, how would the principal interact with everyone, what would the university students do? Many people talked. Shelly began the conversation. Donna talked once, and the university students talked several times. Another teacher will join us next week (she was absent for the first two classes), and she tends to talk a LOT, so I will be interested in seeing how she fits into the group. I need to be willing and ready to step in if she dominates. Shelly was the dominant speaker today, but didn't overpower others. As the hour went on, others jumped in. Everyone wanted to listen to Shelly. Since she just finished her master's degree, I think she's seen as the expert.

During the third class, I realized the discussion needed to be structured in some way. I sat and listened as the three men in class dominated the entire hour discussion. Only Christina and I interrupted them to talk; the rest of the women sat and politely listened. *We can't go on this way. Nobody else can say a thing if they go on and on and on. We can't become a community if we can't all equally talk and share. I can see Edna drawing pictures in her journal; it looks like Nancy is making a grocery list and several others are looking through the text. People won't return to listen to three people talk. What does this model for the university students? This class needs to be a place for the kind of exploratory talk Douglas Barnes (1992) describes. Next week, Harvard Discussion!*

Harvard Discussion is a method of discussion I invented to allow all my sixth graders to participate equally. Each student is given a specific number of tokens to use. Only one person can speak at a time, and when he or she finishes speaking, he or she displays the token in front of them. During the discussion time, everyone must use all his or her tokens. Once a student uses his or her tokens, then he or she must be silent and listen. They can't speak again. The strengths of the method are that it limits the very vocal student and yet allows the quiet student to find a space to enter into the conversation. The weakness is the initial feeling of pressure to talk. I've found this wears off after a few sessions.

The following week, I introduced Harvard Discussion. Everyone took two tokens, and we began. Alexis started. She talked for seven minutes; then Paul jumped in. He, too, talked for about ten minutes. *What's going on here? Oh, I see. They think they have to make a speech.* Using my token, I explained that the tokens don't require

a "formal speech"; even "yes" is worth a token. We took off again. After seeing that people were using the token time to "tell" rather than "converse," I again interrupted and told them that from now on there's a three-minute time limit. With lots of grins, we began again. *At last, now we have it. It will get easier each time.* Just like writing in journals, passing out tokens became a part of our class routine. In October, I wrote:

> This will make our third week of Harvard Discussion. The majority said they like it, because everyone gets to talk. It's definitely cut down on the men talking so much. The university students contribute wonderful things. I've been watching Debbie. She gets red every time she talks, but she talks with more conviction and from the heart now, rather than making surface comments.

By the end of October, the discussion was going smoothly, and everyone was talking. So I decided to not use Harvard Discussion and see if we could continue without the use of tokens. After class, I recorded my observations:

> We didn't do Harvard Discussion this time. I wanted to see what would happen. We quickly fell back into old patterns. The same people spoke; the rest remained quiet. Paul talked at long length. Mark spoke briefly. He's taken the "token" message to heart, I think. So it's back to Harvard Discussion next week.

> This group is getting off track more and more often now. I wonder if it's because we feel more comfortable to make side comments and that then leads us astray. I've also noticed how those with "powerful" voices sway the group. This is another reason to return to Harvard Discussion. It allows everyone to be powerful.

We continued this procedure until later in November. At the end of a particular class, I ended the discussion early to talk about the text for next semester. I recorded the events in my journal:

Before I could begin to share possible books for the next semester's class, Christina jumped in. She began the discussion with her concern about the tokens. She didn't like them and thought they shut down the spontaneity of the discussion. Some others agree; others stated they liked them. I interrupted the debate. "I waited for about four meetings before we began to use them. It was evident to me after that time, that four or five people were doing all the talking and others didn't have a chance to jump in. It's only since we've been using tokens that Lee and Debbie have participated. They share important observations and insights that we didn't hear before. In my past experience with adults, I've found that the ones who hate the tokens are the ones who are quite verbal and dominate the discussion, and the ones who like them are the quiet ones who want to talk but can't get in." There was a long pause at that. The principal jumped in and said that she really liked the tokens as it provided reflective thinking time within the discussion, and the comments were more thoughtful.

Since I was being blunt, I added, "The other reason for using tokens is that the men dominate the discussion with long, involved stories. They are interesting, but it keeps everyone else from talking."

Wonder what this comment will do to our community? I'm taking a big risk here by being very honest in this discussion with them. We've been together since August, so maybe we're strong enough to handle a bit of dissension.

Boy, did that create a stir! Mark's hair bristled up, and he said, "It's not a gender issue. I'm highly verbal, but so are some women." He then proceeded to take fifteen minutes to tell us that. Edna jumped in and said that she thought I was extremely sensitive to everyone and wouldn't put anyone in an uncomfortable position. After a continued discussion (in which only five "verbal" teachers spoke) we reached an agreement. We decided to use one token then have an open discussion time in which everyone would monitor his or her speaking time. We'll see how it works.

> I felt that I needed to represent the good of the whole community rather than let a few dominate. I will continue to monitor talking time to ensure that all members can participate. Some of the people said that sometimes they don't like to participate. They want to come and listen. I feel that as a member of this community, they have an obligation to be a participating member. We are denied their insights if they don't talk with us. As I tell my kids, "We all participate here." I guess I feel strongly about this with the teachers because many of the teachers in my building do this. They passively sit through everything. This might be an issue that comes up again before the class is over.

I'm amazed at my blatant use of power as I read through my journal entry. Even though we reach a compromise with the tokens, it's evident I am unwilling to share control. It's obvious I am not living my values of respect for the other.

From then on the class routine changed to include the use of one token. It took us about twenty minutes for everyone to use his or her tokens and then for the remaining time, it was a regular discussion with people jumping in and out of the conversation. *The token discussion was an important one for us as a community. Up until that time, I was "in charge." Now we had solved a problem and decided on a course of action together.* **This issue helped to define who we were and what we valued. As I shared my concern for the community as a whole, maybe the participants saw a new view of the class, one of a total community where we do what's best for the entire group rather than individuals. This issue also helped to highlight my continuing struggle with power.**

A few weeks after the token decision, I interviewed a few participants to see if the feeling of community still existed. The participants referred frequently to the class as a closer group of individuals within the school This is particularly significant since communities are built upon individuals supporting one another (Johnson, Johnson & Holubec, 1986; Shaffer & Anundsen, 1993). It was reassuring to me to see we, as a community, had weathered the storm of dissent. In the interview, Susan states:

> As part of the class, I think it was really good to get together, and it helped me get closer to the method students and even the staff.

As a university student, Beth pointed out:

I think the class was really, really, really, really helpful for two main reasons. I think the first reason was that it made it so that there was more of a community for me as a methods student. We're closer as a group than other method students at the other schools. And the other way it was helpful was that we've talked about all of these issues in our university classes forever. So it was kind of like "Ah, here we go again." But we heard it from people here that have been doing it for seventeen, eighteen, nineteen years. . . . The issues were brought out, but there was insight this time rather than just philosophy.

Later in the interview, Shelly mentioned:

I like the way you structured, both ways, the free-for-all and then the structured time so that everybody has a chance to talk. . . . I particularly enjoyed the openness, I guess that's the word, of requirements, topics, personality exchanges, and the way we get off track a lot and you so tactfully bring us back (laughter) into focus. I've really enjoyed the way that it's been structured.

Christina also shared her thoughts:

I wish and hope that we can continue to do classes like this, whether we will all be able to attend time wise or not. We need to have that as educators. I think we're all working in isolated little niches and that often times we really feel without connectedness. This is an opportunity to reconnect. It's important to have that to stay healthy and at least feel you are a part of a whole of something.

I'm continually reminded how important time is—time to talk, time to share, time to come together, to offer opportunities for individuals to reflect and grow.

Challenges

Anita came running into my yard, "Help! My horses are loose. They went that way, I think." My two sons and I grabbed our jackets and took off through the woods. Finding and returning Anita's horses became part of our routine that summer. While living in this neighborhood, my family and I have looked for lost dogs, lost children, and lost mail. We've done our share of returning as well. One late afternoon, Harold, our sheepdog, arrived home dragging a hindquarter of a moose. Evidently, Harold helped himself to a large piece of Dick's moose as it was being packaged for the freezer. Returning is much harder than finding. These are the challenges of living in a neighborhood. The unexpected happenings in a neighborhood can strengthen relationships.

The Wednesday afternoon class also faced challenges: challenges of being together, coming together, and working together. Some challenges I created to foster the development of the community, but some, like Anita's horses and Harold's moose, just happened.

Being Together

Talk was the foundation of the class and proved to be not only a planned challenge but an unexpected one as well. During the Harvard Discussion strategy, everyone participated. I never knew what direction the discussion would take us, but I knew that all would talk. When the open discussion segment began, however, I never knew what would happen. Sometimes people would be so eager to share, they would jump in at the first pause. But other times, we would have long periods of silence as some looked at their books or notes while others drew pictures or ate. I never knew what to expect. Each gathering was so different. They didn't share my expected interaction patterns as I observed in my sixth graders. In my classroom, there were students I could always count on to speak on any topic. In this community, that was not the case. My journal entries illustrate the variety of interaction patterns. Each class was so different. My journal entries record my perception of the varied talk.

> Sept. 21
>
> Great discussion on engaging students in learning situations. I always worry that no one will say anything, but that hasn't happened yet. It's

great to have so many people sharing. While we didn't resolve anything, we have much to think about.

If this is the indication of every class, it will be a great semester. Everyone really focused on the topic and had lots to say. But I was unprepared for the generalized type of talk that happened the following week.

Sept. 28

The discussion took an entirely different turn than expected. (Topic: valuing differences and setting common goals.) I thought we would talk about the issue within the classroom, but it was more of a wandering or seeking of where we are. We haven't even begun to scratch the surface of our self-understanding.

Even though we didn't stay on the topic, everyone enthusiastically shared. They seem to enjoy exploring these issues together. While there was much talking last week, the momentum didn't carry into the next class.

Oct. 12

A difficult topic (assessment and evaluation)—lots of pauses. The topic of evaluation is too personal and too close maybe? It's interwoven with our being. Lynn said, "It reflects how we view life." It probably does.

What happened here? Why the sudden silence? Maybe we don't feel the need to "perform" for the group any longer. Are we settling into a normal pattern now that we've been together for awhile? With the last class experience in my mind, I was prepared for a quiet class, but that wasn't the case. Everyone was filled with ideas to share:

Oct. 18

Good discussion tonight. Lots of ideas on reflection and empowerment. We're all at so many different places in terms of reflection, and it was obvious in tonight's discussion.

This isn't at all what I thought would happen. Did they eat chocolate before coming to class? By now, I've given up on what to expect.

I can provide the setting, but as the community takes on a life of its own, the members determine their own rhythm of talk.

I set out to try and understand the rhythms of the class in order to create a solution to the extremely varied levels of talk. I learned to listen to the members' conversations before class and use it a gauge of participation. If most of them were actively engaged, I waited an additional five minutes or so to begin the class to give them more talking time, knowing the enthusiasm would carry over into the discussion. If the room was rather quiet, however, I began right on time, but provided a conversation starter, such as "Turn to the person sitting beside you and tell them one wonderful thing that happened to you today." These got us talking.

Coming Together

Building on my knowledge gained from working with my sixth grade students, I realized the participants and I needed time to relax and get to know one another before we plunged into the discussions. Johnson and Johnson (1982) note that cohesion results in group trust and acceptance of individual differences. So rather than discussing the reasons for and benefits of cooperation as Elizabeth Cohen (1994) suggests as a way to begin, I focused on initiating cohesion through a live experience.

Even though we all teach in the same building, it's important for us to take time to learn each other's names. It's especially important for the university students. It will help them feel like part of the class. It's also important to be silly together. We'll begin with the first class in the gym so that we can play several games. "Okay, don't get too comfortable. We're going to the gym to play."

"I thought this was supposed to be a credit class. Are you sure we can play?"

"Come along. When we get to the gym form a circle."

"Hey, teacher, do I have to hold her hand?"

"All right group, listen up. We're going to throw this ball and as you throw it to a person, shout their name. The object is to make sure everyone receives the ball only once and to go as fast as we can." *Great. They're playing and having fun. The university students add a youthful and energetic element.* "That was good. Now we're going to throw the ball again along with this rubber snake."

"Yuck, teacher, I hate snakes."

"What if it bites me?"

"Now I know how your students act. (Lots of laughter.) Remember throw it to the same person you did last time. I'll start again. EDNA!" *I'll wait a minute to get the ball going, then I'll throw the snake.* "EDNA!"

"What? Oh! The snake! NANCY!"

This is great. The gym is filled with names and laughter. Some are finding very creative ways of throwing the ball and snake. This is fun! I see some of my sixth graders standing at the door watching. I can tell they are wondering what crazy things the teachers are doing. I'll tell them all about it tomorrow. When we finish this game, we'll see how many of us can say everyone's name. Then we'll go back to the research room, go over the class requirements, write in our journals, and call it quits for today. I want them to have a strong positive feeling about being part of this class. I want them to look forward to coming back next week. We played similar games at the beginning of the next three classes, and I always had a few in the back of my mind if I felt we needed a change of pace.

By the second week in October, I was seeing signs of class unity. Susan brought in a cartoon "for our class."

The four mentor teachers of the university students sent me an e-mail message that same week.

Terri,

We just received a fax from the university about a meeting. We don't have to go do we, since we go to our class once a week? Would you call and make sure we don't have to attend?

Thanks,

Shelly, Edna, Susan, and Alexis

I love the use of the word "we"; it's a sure sign of group identification. It's exactly what I look for with the children in my classroom.

In my classroom, I consciously moved students in and out of many group configurations to weaken territorial boundaries. In working with my students over time, I came to understand how relationships are often formed based on proximity. I completely forgot about this until I noticed the participants of the Wednesday class sat in the same place for the first two meetings. **But then so did I.** So at the third class **I** began sitting in a new place each week. *Territory is established in such a short time. Everyone sat in the same place for the first and second classes. I'll choose a new place and see what happens.* When I changed seats, I forced others to do the same. It provided the opportunity to interact with new people each week. This was especially important for the partner conversational activities. *By sitting beside someone new, the teachers can interact and hear a variety of opinions. We get too used to sitting beside people who we feel comfortable with and who share our perceptions.* There were a few good-natured comments, such as, "Hey, you're in my seat," but after a couple of weeks of choosing a new place at the table, it became an accepted part of the class.

I creatively used the idea of changing location to stimulate new conversation. On that particular Wednesday in November, everyone sat at the table, looking down. We were all tired from parent-teacher conferences. *I doubt that very many read the chapter. We have two choices: we can either sit here and say nothing, or we can get up and talk about something else. Let's see what happens if we get up.* "Okay, gang, everyone up. Up, up, up. Find another place to sit and then tell a partner what you'll be doing over Christmas break." I found this to be a good strategy for those days when everyone was worn out and too tired to think. I used it several times during the semester.

Movement was used for a different purpose the afternoon we discussed the topic of professional commitment. The preclass chatter was lively and energetic. Whispers continued through journal writing. *Wow, I can tell everyone has a lot to say tonight. Wonder what would happen if we divide into groups of four or so and let the conversation occur there? That would give more people a longer time to talk. We wouldn't hear everyone's ideas or comments, but I get the feeling that this group needs to talk.* After we completed our journals, we counted by fours and met in small groups scattered to the corners for the rest of the hour. A high level of conversation filled the room, and many stayed after the class ended to continue talking. This action increased the opportunity for everyone to talk and share. Just as I do frequently in my

classroom, I creatively restructured the class based on my observation of the participants.

The more familiar I became with the participants, the greater risks I took in nudging them to do what I thought we should for the benefit of the individuals and the community. This follows the similar personal developmental pattern in my classroom. The more comfortable I felt, the more experimental I became.

Working Together

In the story of Eric and the Dancers, I learned the value of creating those magic moments to give everyone personal encouragement. That experience taught me to look for those times when we needed something a little extra. In October, I sensed a lag in enthusiasm around the school and within the Wednesday class. The weather was dark, it was beginning to really get cold, we were starting to hibernate in our rooms.

On October 18, I wrote:

> Morale seems to be low at school. Winter has really set in; I wonder if that's the reason. At our class tomorrow I think I'll take my extra book posters and leave one at each place. It will give us all a boost and be a neat surprise.

I rolled each poster and tied it with bright red yarn and then placed one on each chair. "Is this mine?" "Can I keep it?" "This will be perfect for my dinosaur unit." "Thanks, I'm going to put it on the door." *It's nice to see them smile.* I began class. Christina interrupted, "Wait a minute. I'd like to see all the posters. Let's unroll them and hold them up." We took the next ten minutes sharing and trading posters. *This was a magic moment. It was fun to see them excited about the posters. They had a great time seeing them all and talking about where to put them or how to use them. Plus they talked about the books each poster advertised.* **We learn about each other through unexpected events.**

The other magic moment with this class concerns the November teacher in-service day. At this particular in-service, each building plans how it wishes to spend the day in professional development. The participants of the Wednesday class suggested to Donna that we spend half the day reading professional material. *This is a*

FIRST for this staff. I can't believe that they want to spend the morning reading professional literature. A few of us sat down and defined professional material as "texts, journals, articles, etc. that extended professional thinking." We decided that "how-to" books or teacher manuals would not be considered appropriate reading for the morning.

On the in-service day, we all brought books and journals to share and displayed them on the tables in the library. Some of the class participants asked me to bring some of the books that I'd mentioned in class so they could read them. *I am surprised they remembered them.* The entire staff spent four hours in the library examining, reading, and discussing. *How much of an influence did the Wednesday class have on this decision? Maybe they are beginning to see the value of discovering the ideas of others.* Not only did we get to read new books, but because every staff member was also in the library, we had the opportunity to share with people we seldom get to see.

Celebrations

The roof was on, plastic covered the windows, and the insulation was stuffed between the joists. Ken and I celebrated by burning the scrap lumber and roasting hot dogs. We invited the neighbors to join us. Sitting on logs around the fire, hot dogs or marshmallows toasting in the fire, eating potato chips out of the bag, drinking soda from the can, we applauded our achievement. Our neighborhood celebrations tend to be casual.

It's the same for the Wednesday afternoon class. The celebrations are low key, relaxed, and applaud our achievements. Again, I knew from my classroom experience and working with the parents that celebrations provide joyous moments that can strengthen the ties between the members. We had three celebrations during the semester; two recognized the whole group and one focused on the university students.

The first occurred at the end of the first grading period in October. *This is the time when we all feel the extra burden of completing report cards. It's hard to teach a full day and still average grades and prepare for parent conferences. I've been reading about successful companies. One of their strategies is to take time for fun together (Peters & Austin, 1985). It looks like this would be an ideal time.* That week, when the class members arrived in the research room, they found a shiny multicolored pencil taped to the following note:

Congratulations! You are the proud new owner of a magic pencil. It has all the answers to everything. It can complete report cards and student narratives in half the time.

Terri

P.S. Don't lose it, it will come in handy during income tax time!

Knowing that we are all in the same situation helps. It also lets them know that I care about them and their well being. Peterson (1992) believes celebrations should reflect what is valued. With this simple gift, I want the teachers to know that I value them.

The second celebration occurred in November, when the university students began teaching their week-long lessons. It was their first actual teaching responsibility. *I remember my first teaching unit. I was so nervous the night before, I could hardly sleep. I bet they are feeling the same way. We need to reassure them that we've all been there and also celebrate their accomplishments. We'll do something at this week's class.* **This is exactly what I did in the Haircut story. I drew upon my past experience to "feel" the situation of the other, and then based my response on that empathic feeling.** After journal writing, I announced, "Would all the university people please stand. For those of you who don't know, these five teachers began their week-long unit this week. I don't know about the rest of you, but I was really nervous the first time I stood in front of a class. So I thought we should celebrate their efforts by sharing our first teaching experiences. Before we begin our stories, I have the Richardson Elementary Teaching Award to give." Each university student received an apple with a label on the side that said, "Teacher." As they ate the apples, the rest of us shared our beginning experiences with them. *It was important to take the time to recognize this major step for the university students.* **In examining cohesive businesses, Peters and Waterman (1982) point out that stories, myths, and legends about the business convey attitudes and values of the company. This first-year story ceremony was like a welcome into the universal organization of teaching. Sharing the stories helped us to see our commonalties as well as opening the way for the university students to "officially" join.**

I planned the last celebration for our last class of the semester. *We need to do something together that honors all that we've done. I need to think of something fun, light, and yet significant. Ah, how about A Pat On The Back? Perfect. I'll gather all the materials and have it ready to go on Wednesday.* As everyone arrived on

Wednesday, art materials were distributed on the tables. After tracing their hands, each person cut it out and taped it to his or her back. "Now, it's your job to write a positive comment on the hand of each person." The teachers grabbed a pencil and started for the nearest back. We quickly formed long trains and talked as we scribbled comments.

"Can I move your hair?"

"What can I say about you that is fit to write?"

"While you're writing, why don't you rub my neck?"

"Hey, I need to write on your hand."

"Don't move, I'm not done yet."

This was perfect. We could write personal comments, move around and be silly at the same time. I wonder how many will return for the class next semester?

Reflection

Yesterday, I finished writing the above section. I spent the night tossing and turning, thinking about what I now know. The first bits are easy. They concern the climate and the celebrations. I now know to think carefully about conversational patterns and arrange the tables to allow for the greatest vision. That really hampered our first couple of classes. The use of the research room was a wise decision. It was a neutral area, and I think it fostered the relaxed, open atmosphere of the class. I'm glad we did the celebrations. The three were spaced evenly apart and added an unexpected element of surprise to the class.

The other parts of the class aren't quite so easy to think about. I had a very specific vision for the class. The class didn't match my ideal, which forced me to rethink some of my assumptions. I forgot that the participants were not eagerly running to attend the class at the end of a working day. They were teachers and other staff members who usually didn't have a minute to sit down once they got to school and still added an extra hour to their day to come to class.

I've been involved with teacher discussion groups before, so I knew what I wanted for my professional growth. I wanted to be a member of a group that takes time to deeply consider and explore the happenings of the classroom in relation to personal actions and beliefs. This type of action was new to some of the participants in the class, and I don't think some were ready to see the personal value of reflective thinking. The participants in the class were newcomers in the neighborhood, however.

At times, I tended to lose sight of the fact that most of this group of individuals had not engaged in professional dialogue recently. I became impatient with the long pauses in the conversation and impatient when I felt they didn't address the specific issue. I wanted in-depth meaningful discussion. What I heard was a great deal of generalized talk. Talk about education in general, and very few comments about personal beliefs or connections to the readings. I had to keep telling myself to have patience, have patience, have patience. This was a baby step into a professional community.

Harvard Discussion was a blessing and a curse. I knew that some people hated it with a vengeance while others appreciated the slowing of the conversation. From my position as facilitator it eased my role. I didn't have to play the role of arbitrator or judge. After the second time or so, others volunteered to be the three-minute timekeeper for the open discussions. I realize it does stifle spontaneity since it doesn't allow for the natural conversation patterns to occur. The benefit is allowing everyone at the table to be heard as an equal. This was the reason I gave for using this strategy.

My underlying agenda for using this discussion method was to require everyone to talk. For the practicing teachers, I wanted to force them to think and comment about the issues. I didn't want them to sit passively and then leave the room whispering to a colleague about what was said. Everyone's comments needed to be heard by all. For the university students, I wanted them to practice being verbal in front of a group. I wanted them to automatically assume that being a teacher meant that you read, thought, and TALKED about educational issues. Part of my vision of a professional community included actively thinking teachers. So I pushed all of them to this end through the use of the token system.

If I were to start all over again, I would use the Harvard Discussion strategy at the first meeting. Then I think it would be accepted as part of the class routine. Later, it could be gradually phased out if it were no longer needed.

So what did I learn? I know that I can adapt methods of creating community to fit new groups of individuals. I need to be observant so that adjustments can be made to benefit the class. I need to know the participants and their points of view.

I do believe there was a feeling of community within the class. In a survey I gave at the end of the class, I asked, "What was the most significant element of this class for you?" One teacher answered:

I guess the most significant element of the class was when we stayed after our day and talked about community. That's what was so important for me—the sense of *community* that I was made to feel part of.

Another person commented:

Professional discussion about teaching and learners with a group of colleagues dedicated to the teaching profession. A nonthreatening atmosphere where everyone's opinions/thoughts/suggestions were equally respected and accepted.

Others listed elements of a professional community, such as,

The sharing was most significant. . . . We don't get to discuss those things in depth usually. I learned so much.
We could share openly. . ., listen to others, and walk away rethinking.
The reading and the reflection in class. The conversation with co-workers allows me to measure myself.
The easy sharing of ideas . . . at the end of long days uplifted my spirits and renewed my outlook.

As I was working on this study, I realized that ten out of the seventeen class members were previous members of the Parks Elementary staff. Of the seven remaining class members, five were the university students, one a university advisor, and one our librarian. Other than the librarian, there were no other staff members involved in the class. The question I have to ask myself is, "How much did I contribute to the building of community? How much was already there?" It's evident from the comments of the university students and the advisor that they felt very much a part of the class community.

During my early morning walk today, I thought about my neighborhood. Fred has moved away, and a new family with two small, elf-like children is now living behind the snow pea hedge. Al and Robin are divorced and living separate lives in Anchorage. Jack is still in his blue suburban house and has increased his family by one child and two cats. As for George, we don't hear much from him. He's retreated

into his cabin and wages war on the government through letters. My neighborhood has changed. It's not the same; it's a community, but not the same as our first.

The Wednesday afternoon class also changed. As a class, we decided to continue for a second semester. Before Christmas, I distributed agendas and the reading schedules to every staff member. We began the class with sixteen teachers, five university students, a university advisor, a university instructor, and the university's director of education. Only one first-semester teacher decided not to continue with the second class. The new people brought in new personalities, new ideas, and new concerns. It was not the same; like the other class, it became a community over the course of the semester, but not the same as our first. A new neighborhood.

CHAPTER 6

LEAVING COMMUNITY: AN UNEXPECTED EVENT
DEPARTING THE SCHOOL COLLEAGUE COMMUNITY

Note to the Reader

In this chapter, you'll see that not all goes as I envisioned. I begin with a description of the changes in my own neighborhood and then describe the second semester at Richardson Elementary.

Required to choose a new reading program, this account describes my role and actions as the entire school decides on the specific reading series. I share my feelings and emotions as I work to influence the outcome. I show how my attempts do not bring my expected results, and I watch as my perceived elements of community dissolve and then reform with me on the outside of the new social organization.

The chapter concludes as I realize the strength of my values. In this critical incident, I truly learn about aligning my actions with my beliefs as I decide to leave the school rather than teach this particular reading program.

And they lived happily ever after at Richardson Elementary . . .

Not quite.

That's the way all stories end, but life has a way of introducing unexpected events that intrude upon the "happily ever after" part. My neighborhood community continued to change. Al and Robin bought a dog that crawled under our fencing and ate all twelve of my son Aaron's chickens, thus ending Aaron's dreams of making a million in the egg-selling business. George got a divorce and invited the world over for his weekend parties of ear-splitting music, drinking, swearing, and car racing at three in the morning. Several of us had to rebuild our houses because of permafrost. Not everything is always wonderful.

The second semester in my school wasn't wonderful either. The Wednesday afternoon class continued. We incorporated the new members into the group with minimal adjustment. The teachers seemed happy with the text and attendance continued to be high. I felt we were growing in creating a school community, but I failed to read the importance of the changing weather.

In Fairbanks, there are signs that indicate a weather change. The people who have lived there for a long time can easily read them and adjust their lives. The new residents just stumble into whatever comes along. After living in Alaska for twenty-seven years, I know that wind means a drastic change in weather; I know where to look to find storm clouds; I know that the blooms of the fireweed indicate the length of the rest of the summer. But I can't read the habits of the birds or understand what insect behavior has to do with the temperature or interpret the meaning of certain types of clouds.

I was in a similar position in my school. I knew that some teachers were uneasy about the whole language approach to reading. I knew that the second grade teachers pooled their classroom funds to buy a basal reading series, even though it was not aligned with the school district's language arts policy. Insect warnings here, and I dismissed it as an irritating mosquito. I was concerned but not overly so. Paul, my school's Chapter 1 teacher, and I planned to offer some after-school sessions next fall that might help those teachers who felt uncomfortable or unsure about teaching literacy. *I'm looking forward to working with Paul. He was a college student of mine, and it's fun to see him develop. He's my ally in the importance of whole language and the process approach to learning for these children.*

In January, Donna, my principal, and I talked about our school's reading scores. She was getting a lot of pressure from our central office to "do something"

about the poor standardized test results. We talked about the possibility of establishing a Reading Recovery (Clay, 1993) approach for the five first-grade classes for the next year. *I have my doubts about Reading Recovery. It's great for the students who need the intensive intervention, but there isn't any substantiation that the learning extends past the third grade. It's a lot of work and money for minimal success. We should take the money that we would spend on Reading Recovery training and spend it on helping our staff in understanding the reading process so that each teacher is aware of all the theoretical and practical philosophies concerning literacy. Then each teacher has the knowledge to adapt to each child. We have such a diverse population; it's really important to be flexible.*

I shared Reading Recovery articles that supported my concerns about the program with Donna, but she was determined to "find" the program that would "fix" our students. The birds are restless, jumping from place to place, chattering and pecking at everything. *Our after-school literacy offerings next year will help these teachers.* **I wonder what made me think that the teachers would come to these sessions? My knowledge of their past experience in voluntary study opportunities (such as credit classes and staff development classes) should have told me that attendance would be minimal. I was overly confident because of the fifteen participants in the Wednesday afternoon class.**

As discussed earlier during our January building in-service, the Richardson Elementary staff decided to spend the morning reading professional books, journals, and articles. Wow! Sunny and clear weather here, and the birds have settled and seem content. *Now is my time to offer those whole language resources to the staff. I'll include Reading Recovery material so teachers can compare the philosophy behind the two. When they compare, they can't help but see the benefits of the constructivist approach.* We read and met twice in small discussion groups. Everyone left for lunch happy, smiling, and relaxed.

In February, Donna asked me to read several articles about Success For All (SFA), a reading program developed at Johns Hopkins University (Slavin, Madden, Karweit, Dolan, Wasik, 1992). Initially, I was impressed. *This program works with novels, encourages cooperative learning, supports the writing process, and offers training for teachers. This might be what we need to put a bit of zip into the staff concerning reading, like a refreshing spring breeze.*

But when I read more about SFA beyond the three articles initially offered, I was disturbed with the philosophy and the teaching application. The spring breeze just

turned into a strong winter gale! *Yes, this program supports the use of novels, but requires the traditional ten comprehension questions at the end of each chapter. SFA cleverly disguises this under a new name as "Treasure Hunts" to make it sound innovative. Not only that, but the SFA creators insist that they construct the questions, not the teacher. We have to identify each novel we're going to use so they can construct the questions. This leaves no room for me to personalize the reading. I won't know what we are going to read until I know the students and their needs.*

They do support cooperative learning, but require the classroom to divide into groups with the purpose of earning points to compete for certificates. Cooperation for competition! There is also little mention of classroom dynamics or community building. The teachers are going to be shocked when the students don't quickly and willingly work together after being put on teams. I see visions of my first attempts at writing response groups.

The writing process isn't demonstrated at all. Prompts are given, and the student has no choice. Writing is scheduled only twice a week for twenty minutes at a time. There is no long-term writing time for the students. Emphasis is on use of complete sentences and editing the Treasure Hunt questions.

Yes, the Success For All program does offer staff training four times a year. Their training consists of showing the teachers how to use the manual, not how to think about the multilayered aspects of literacy or student needs. The entire ninety minute classroom lesson is clearly scripted. There is no room for deviation or personal adaptation. A school facilitator will monitor each teacher on a weekly basis by checking off observed teaching behavior on a list provided by Johns Hopkins.

The students are continually assessed as well. Every nine weeks they take a test consisting of comprehension questions. Every Friday, they take a vocabulary test. You don't gauge the growth of your garden by pulling up the plants every week to look at the roots and then jamming it back in the ground. More time is spent on assessment than on writing.

Plus! Students are grouped by ability across grade levels for ninety minutes a day. I don't get to teach my own kids. AND I have to identify them according to high, middle, and slow readers. I don't see my students this way. In my room we're all readers and writers with a variety of strengths and weaknesses. We celebrate strengths and support growth. I have NEVER tracked my students; how can I begin now?

Surely, Donna can't be serious about adopting this program. She's always been firm about not tracking students. Maybe she's not fully aware of this. The teachers need to know more about this program. I need to share these articles with the other teachers now.

So I began my campaign. My goal was to fully familiarize the teachers with all views, not just the information distributed by the central office. I felt we needed to have as much knowledge as possible to make any sort of intelligent decision about this program. *I can choose to do this two ways. I can go underground and attempt to gain support of my views by pulling a select few teachers together and persuading them to my point of view. I know which people would be susceptible to this, and I could easily do this. If I did, it has the potential to divide the staff. I could get very emotional and create situations where others would do the same. After this is all over, however, the divisions would be hard to heal.*

Or I could be above board, make my views known, present all evidence, and let the teachers decide as rational people. This is what I've been trying to model in the Wednesday afternoon class. I have faith that the teachers will see this as an important issue and examine it closely. I did not see the black clouds lurking on the horizon.

I spent my weekend copying articles and putting them in the teachers' boxes. I even underlined the important parts for the teachers who were not inclined to read because of time constraints. (As the facilitator for the school Literacy Committee, I often did this. The teachers were used to this format, and many liked the idea of reading the essence of the article first.) I engaged teachers in conversations in the halls, at the table in the staff lounge, and by the mailboxes. I wanted them to talk about SFA, hear what others had to say, and think about their position.

While I was engaging teachers within the building, central office became more involved. The Chapter 1 coordinator flew to Washington, D.C., to attend a conference sponsored by Johns Hopkins. The coordinator returned enthusiastically endorsing Success For All. At the same time, Richardson Elementary was named a Chapter 1 school, which meant that we were now considered a poverty-level school. As a Chapter 1 school, we would receive about $240,000.

To obtain the money, however, the school district required Richardson Elementary to adopt a research-based reading program, and according to the coordinator, the only two research-based reading programs were Reading Recovery and Success For All. *Wait a minute here! There are other reading philosophies that meet the criteria. Why the big push for this one? Other ideas aren't being given a*

chance. I asked about other research-based literacy programs and was told the Chapter 1 coordinator had already examined that issue, and these were the only two that qualified as research-based. *These were the only two SHE wanted us to consider. Actually she only wanted SFA, since she eliminated Reading Recovery because of cost.*

I continued to talk to the principal about my concerns. *She doesn't really see why I'm so concerned about this. She sees that I'm upset, but doesn't see why. She keeps reassuring me that it will be focused at the primary level and I won't be impacted by it at all. Part of me wants to believe her, but the other part of me is watching the clouds envelop the mountain peaks and settle in the valleys, inching closer.* I convinced the principal that teachers needed time to talk. We were getting information but didn't have the time to meet as a community for discussion. I continued to have faith in the teachers' ability to see the problems with Success For All.

With the help of two other grade-level leaders, I constructed a schedule that allowed all the classrooms to be supervised by the student teachers and parent volunteers while teachers met in specific grade levels to discuss the program. Knowing that talk is sometimes hampered by administration, I asked that the principal and central office personnel not be involved in these one-hour sessions, and they agreed. Each grade level had its designated meeting area, pizza and soda was provided, and all that was needed was active talk. I met with my sixth-grade teachers. I answered a few questions, and encouraged them to search out their own answers within the readings. *It was obvious from their questions and comments they hadn't read the articles or given much thought about the program.*

Later that week, while in an assembly about moose safety, Donna came to me and said, "Let's go downtown today at 11:00 a.m. and meet with the Chapter 1 coordinator. I know you have some concerns." *I resent being summoned. It's like being sent to the principal's office. I'm going to go because it's a command performance, so how can I turn it to my advantage? I'll share my concerns, but also share the questions from the other teachers as well. It's like a personal audience with the Pope. Thank goodness I have student teachers. They can teach the rest of the morning while I pull myself together.* I can see ominous thunderclouds pushed my way by hurricane winds. *Things don't look good.* While my student teachers worked with my sixth graders, I visited one teacher in each grade level and quickly gathered his or her questions or concerns about SFA.

I had my list in hand when we left. Donna drove. At the central office, the secretary gave me a long look and ushered us in. *I've been designated as the "troublemaker." I feel like I've come to be "rehabilitated." Let's see what happens next.* The coordinator gave an overview of the program and answered all the questions on my list. I remember looking into her eyes and asking, "How can I teach this program when it's against what I so firmly believe?" She told me, "Maybe you just have to give some things up. You can't have everything your way. How do you know your way is right?" *How can you say something like that? I see what works in my classroom. I've read, thought about, and discussed literacy issues for many years. How can you dismiss me and my accumulated knowledge like that? I see the impatience in your eyes. You just hurt my heart. . . . I will not cry here.*

"There will be a representative from Johns Hopkins here on Wednesday of next week. Your school will vote on the following Friday whether or not to accept the program. You need 80% of the staff in favor before Johns Hopkins will agree to work with you. I'm glad you came in so we could have this talk." *She's not glad I came in.* **I see now that I threatened her careful plan. The meeting was a message for me to stop the resistance personally and with the teachers in my school.** Ninety-mile-an-hour winds sweep around me with full force.

I returned to school and e-mailed everyone the information I had gained from the Chapter 1 coordinator. *I will be very businesslike in the writing of these notes. I won't add my comments or show my anger, even though I really want to. The teachers need to make their own decisions about this.* By now everyone on the staff knew my position. I casually asked teachers how they felt about grouping or how they felt about having a facilitator monitor their teaching on a weekly basis. None were concerned with these issues.

One of the items I discovered while at the central office was that if Richardson Elementary didn't choose SFA, then the administration would cut all Chapter 1 funding for a year. During that year, we would have the opportunity to investigate and then present our own research-based program. We would receive money for in-service days so that we could meet and plan. *Is the wind diminishing or is it my imagination? This is the only glimmer of hope I see.* I clung desperately to this bit of information. *I know the primary teachers will be concerned about lack of support from the Chapter 1 person. Maybe I can help by finding university students to help with tutoring. We would have a whole year to work on a plan together. We would have the opportunity to really build community as we defined our views of literacy and*

reached a school consensus. We could be united in our views and purpose. Also, we would have a year to explore all sorts of ideas and then create something wonderfully new that fit our students and ourselves. It's a marvelous opportunity and would infuse us all with an excited energy.

After talking with a few teachers, I felt that we again needed to talk about the new information I had discovered. I invited the intermediate and a primary faculty to a meeting the following morning at 8:00 a.m. *I've provided readings, I've talked, I've offered them time to talk. They act like they don't want to be bothered. I know that I cannot teach this program.*

That evening I called the university's director of education, Pam Keating, at home. *I'm really desperate to call the director of education at home. She's my last resort. I've run out of ideas on how to keep this program out of the building and away from my kids.* After leaving an incoherent, tearful message and yelling at my husband, I sat at the computer all night planning a workable alternative, involving university students as reading tutors, in-service schedules, and possible places to begin. That night I wrote in my journal:

> Okay, here's the deal. How much do I follow my ethics and my beliefs? Do I agree to teach and represent a system that I believe in my heart is wrong? Or do I go along with the system just to teach? How can I support Richardson Elementary as a professional development site to the University of Alaska when I can't agree ethically with what the teachers want to do in reading?
>
> Why is the world so complicated? Why can't it be simple and the way I want it? Maybe I'm a team player only when it's my team. What about the people who didn't believe in the whole language approach and had everything changed for them five years ago? Is that me on the other side now?
>
> So what do I want? I want to stay here because it's comfortable. I know the families and the community. I have a strong commitment not only to the Army community, but to my school colleagues. I want to team teach with Janelle, to teach at the university, and to have everybody happy. That's not to be, evidently. In my devotional last night, I read about moves and the fact that the Lord is with you in all

moves. So move with confidence. I don't have confidence. I don't like the unknown.

The drive to school the next morning was the longest I've ever driven. Over and over in my mind, I reviewed how I would share this alternative plan. I wanted to sound positive and energetic. I wanted them to see the possibilities, not the limitations. I wanted to push the winds away and expose the gentle sun and calm clear sky. *It's almost 8:00. Where is everyone? Ah, here they come. "Find a chair. There's bagels and juice over there."* The meeting was a short and silent one. As I started to share the alternative plan, Christina interrupted by telling me that the staff didn't want to do research for a whole year. They didn't want to lose the money. They just wanted to vote for it. When I asked about specific elements of the program, they said they didn't care, they just wanted a reading program. When I pushed, they said they didn't want to lose the money, and they wanted the convenience of a reading plan. *They don't want to think for themselves. They would rather have someone else do that. They only want to know what to do on Monday. The money means nothing when it comes with so many strings attached. The teachers won't see the money. It's for the salary of the school facilitator and the extra tutors. It won't buy books!*

I can't teach here! How can I work with people who seem to not want to think or work at teaching? Or see any value in their own efforts! It's a building of people who want to read teacher manuals. How can I face these people day after day now that I know how they truly think and feel. I'm indescribably disappointed and lost. Fog, darkness, and raging winds envelop me as I attempt to hold on.

Janelle, my job share partner for the next year, and I met frequently, trying to make sense of the situation. We decided that if we really had to teach the reading program, we would see our day as ninety minutes shorter. We'd teach SFA, but reteach language arts to our classroom students the way we believed it should be taught. We spent hours juggling the daily schedule, trying to fit all the academic requirements in and still have time to integrate reading and writing workshop in our own class.

On Friday, the school voted. The results were announced over e-mail. I was the only dissenting vote. My world dissolved as I faced the reality of the situation. *Now what? If I were not job sharing next year, I could transfer to another school. I can't transfer because Janelle, returning from maternity leave, can't transfer. I think I have to quit. But if I quit, then Janelle will be required to teach full time in this*

building by herself. She needs the job, but that's not fair to her. I invited her to job share with me. I've made a commitment to her. The winds tear and push from all direction. That evening I wrote:

> I've never been unemployed. I wonder how we will exist? I will miss school, I think. I worry about Janelle. She's my partner, and I can't just quit without including her in the decision.
>
> No love, no joy—just bleakness and uncertainty.
>
> What's my feeling of community? It's certainly putting it to the test. Am I willing to pull out, rather than work through this? What does this demonstrate about my beliefs about this community?

Going to school each day became a nightmare. I could barely drag myself out of bed to face another day. The only support I had were my two student teachers. We discussed SFA and its implications endlessly in between classroom teaching. In fact, the politics of the school took precedent over the students. Teaching became a minor activity. *I worry about the impact this has on Tony and Lee, my student teachers. We should be focusing on fine-tuning their teaching ability, yet we spend time trying to find a way out of this mess. They, of course, see everything from my view; they have nothing else to compare it to, and they constantly hear my opinions, although they've seen first-hand how the philosophy of process and choice work with students. I know it's affected their views of the teachers here. For that, I'm sorry. This last part of their student teaching should be a wonderful and glorious experience, full of projects and smiling students. Instead, it's the strain of my concern.*

The good thing, if there is a good aspect to all of this, is that it's shown Lee and Tony what does happen within schools. Maybe it's prepared them for school life in some way. I constantly asked them what they would do as we went through each new development. I want them to consider their own reactions and their thinking in this matter. I want them to be prepared to face any similar situations when they have a job. Am I making them strong or biased? They were shocked when I told them I was thinking of quitting. What kind of model am I for them? The vicious winds don't affect just me, but all those close to me as well. **I needed Tony and Lee much more than they needed me. They provided me with immeasurable support and love.**

The teachers avoided me, and I didn't make the effort to interact with them. We exchanged polite "Good mornings" and bemoaned the problems with the copying machine in the work room, but that was all. I arrived at school early before the anyone else and often was the last to leave. In the middle of April, I wrote:

> Stages of grief, or is it anger? I think I've hit them all concerning this reading program. I wonder if I can identify all of them.
>
> 1. Anger—How could the teachers do this? Don't they know that they are doing to their students? I feel like they sold out for the chance of money and "stuff."
>
> 2. Disappointment—There was no moment of obvious self-reflection. I was told they didn't want to examine other plans. They wanted this one and they wanted it NOW. What is the point of the Wednesday class if they aren't moving toward self-reflection?
>
> 3. Hurt—Personal and professional. Nothing I've done or said made any difference at all. Ever since I've known Donna, she has said no tracking, and yet there was no problem with Success For All.
>
> 4. Personal integrity and ethics—How can I bring preservice teachers into this building now? How can I talk about my practice when I'm involved in this program? How can I maintain my beliefs and still work with these people?
>
> I now have great sadness regarding my colleagues. It's difficult for me to divorce their personal from their professional selves. I believe we live what we are. So what are they? And what am I?

The following week, Donna and Paul, the designated school facilitator, left for a week's training. *It's a relief to have them both out of the building. They are a constant reminder of the changes to come. Maybe I can forget about it for awhile and concentrate on my students and my student teachers. It might provide a bit of breathing room for the faculty as well. It's been a very intense few months. I know when Paul and Donna return, they will be excited about their week and want to share. Like being in the eye of a hurricane, this pause will give me a week to build endurance and courage to face the rest, for what I know is to come.*

When they returned, there were no deviations, no special dispensations, no exceptions. Janelle and I had to teach Success For All. I continued to try to sort out my feelings in my journal:

> It's been a stressful week filled with an over-abounding enthusiasm for the new reading program. (Everyone else's, not mine!) I keep being told by Donna and Paul that I will "love" it and that it has all the elements that I already do. I guess I'm struggling to find my place in all of this, but I continually return to the question of "How can I ethically teach this course if I don't believe the program is best for the students?"

I met with the director of education, Pam Keating, several times to talk about my concerns. She arranged a meeting with Perry Gilmore, assistant professor of education. One afternoon after school, the three of us gathered around a table in the conference room of the School of Education for tea, scones, and talk. After recounting my experiences and perceptions of the events at Richardson, Perry suggested that I view the next year through the eyes of a researcher. She felt that I had an insider's advantage and I would be in a perfect position to note the strengths and weakness of the program and the effect it has on the students and staff. *This is something that I could do. I could get excited about taking this on as a research project.* Both Perry and Pam offered their support and encouraged me to begin some initial writing immediately. I left the meeting feeling optimistic and hopeful. *Maybe the year won't be all that bad.* Is the end of the hurricane within sight? **I found moments when I did think that maybe I could teach Success For All. These brief moments occurred outside of Richardson, but once I returned to school, the reality of what I would have to do the next year weighed on me with an overpowering heaviness.**

One afternoon after school, I wandered down to Nancy's fourth-grade room. *I need someone to talk to, and Nancy is the closest person who might understand.* This was the first real interaction with another teacher since the school voted for SFA. As we talked about the implications of the reading program, I became quite upset and angry. Nancy agreed with me on many points, but continued to support the teachers in their decision. I calmed down, and we left talking of the upcoming field day. While driving home, I thought about our conversation. *I think this was the first time I let anyone at Richardson Elementary really see how upset I am. Nancy is such a patient*

listener, but I can't ever let myself get carried away like that again. The teachers really are enthused about this, and I need to back off. It's my problem now, not theirs. I wasn't fair to Nancy today. She heard how I feel about the teachers and the reading program and that puts her in awkward position. From now on, I talk only to the research group, Ken, and my dogs.

Toward the end of May, I recorded:

> The Success For All reading program continues to plague me. At times I find it so overwhelmingly repulsive it makes me physically sick. I spent all weekend thinking about it. I've got to get a grip! I have to think of ways to overcome this—practically as well as mentally. I think I have to ignore it and then teach reading my way with my group. Job sharing complicates matters, but it can also be supportive. Janelle and I will have each other.
>
> There's been an ease in relationships at school, although there is still a distance with Donna. More and more teachers are talking; maybe I'm talking more also. If there is enthusiastic talk about SFA, it's not around me. What I do hear is how they will change the program. I'm afraid I can't resist reminding them that they voted for it, they wanted it, and it says in the manual there is no changing. (I have to watch myself. I can become very sarcastic and mean.) They answer by saying, "We just wanted the money." I also hear two other types of comments. The public ones, the talk that happens in the office or when many teachers get together—"We have to think of the kids. It will be good for them. We have so many nonreaders." The private ones, the lowered voices of a few teachers gathered in the doorways of the classrooms—"It will improve teachers. We have so many who don't know how to teach reading. This program will force them to REALLY teach it." If there is open talk now of making changes within individual classrooms, it's strange to me that they don't even consider that the "weak" teachers are thinking of program changes as well.
>
> What they don't realize is that a program won't change teachers. It imposes; it doesn't change. We should have taken the available money

and invested in teacher education. I see it as one of the most effective ways to make long-lasting transformation in teachers.

The last week of school ended in a flurry of assemblies, desk cleaning, and good-byes to students. The teachers and I returned the following Tuesday for our first in-service training in SFA. The Chapter 1 coordinator introduced the trainer from Johns Hopkins University and we began. *This is dreadful. Not only is the information not believable, but it's not even a good presentation. She doesn't offer us any new information and shows the same video we saw during the first introduction. This person can't answer any of the questions I ask.*

At the end of a very long day, I'm handed my red, three-ring manual. Other teachers open theirs excitedly while I head for the door to meet Janelle for a planning session. Janelle and I sit outside and discuss, yet again, how we can manage to teach SFA and not let it disrupt our day. We leave discouraged. *I can't do this! I keep returning to the school Open House. How can I stand up in front of parents and tell them that their child will be participating in a program that I find morally offensive? I just can't do that.* The driving winds continue to batter and pound. *How long can I hold on?*

The following day while driving to school, I attempt to gather inner strength. *There's got to be a way to deal with this. Maybe I've not explored every option here. Think, Terri! I'll call Ron, our union president; he might have an idea. He's really my last hope.* Luckily Ron is in his office when I call. I explain the situation and ask, "What would happen to our job share situation if I resign from Richardson?

"I don't know. No one has ever done that before. I do know that no principal has ever turned down a request for a job share, so I think your chances of finding another position as a team is fairly high."

"Okay, if you were in my position, what would you do?"

"I'd go for it. I think there will be some openings. I know several teachers who are planning to retire, but haven't put in their paperwork yet. You may not know if you have a job until August, though."

"Thanks, Ron. I'll let you know what we decide."

Call Janelle and see what she thinks. We talk, list the pros and cons, and decide to take the chance. I hang up the phone. *What are we doing? Neither of us can afford to be unemployed next year. We've decided; now on with the rest of it.* The

winds die down, the trees give a last shake of wind to straighten their leaves, and I can *breathe.*

I found Donna outside, sitting in the sun on a bench by the bicycle rack. "Donna, I'd like to talk with you a minute. You know of my concern with Success For All. We've talked about this from the beginning. Well, Janelle and I have really talked about it, and we both feel that we cannot teach it. We don't believe in its philosophy and we ethically can't do it. So, I guess I'm telling you that I'm leaving. I can't work in this building." *What is she going to say about all of this? We've been together for eight years and have grown to understand and like each other. Will she understand?* After the winds comes a persistent drizzle as the clouds hover overhead.

Donna didn't say anything. She looked over my head into the window of an empty classroom. I sat and watched a wasp attack a dandelion. When she finally lowered her head to look at me, she offered me a primary classroom position and the guarantee that "you don't have to teach Success For All. I'll justify it to the staff that you are doing something experimental."

"No, Donna. You need people in this building who are eager and excited about the program. You don't need someone like me who will continually find negative aspects to every bit. It's not fair to you, and it's not fair to the teachers who are truly excited. I am leaving."

After attempting to get me to reconsider my position, she stated, "What will happen to the Wednesday class? What about the student teachers? They rely on you. I'm disappointed that you aren't professional enough to put the good of the building before your own personal interests." *She knows me very well. She knows exactly my weak areas. I am concerned about the class, and I do have a commitment to the university students. They are the lines that pull at me to stay. But I can't be the one to subject my students to this program. I can't endorse it with my heart. No one seems to understand that.* The rain becomes more intense as it beats on my head and shoulders, penetrating my clothes and hair. I left Donna sitting on the bench and called personnel. I told them I was leaving.

The following day, Janelle arrived to help me pack up the room. As we crated books and math cubes, we decided to go talk to a principal whom we both respect. We needed some advice from an administrator's perspective. We made an appointment for that afternoon.

While sitting in his office, we took turns telling our tale. He listened quietly, playing with a pencil. At the end, he turned to look at the fish floating by on his

computer screen; then he offered us a position in his school. We didn't even hesitate, we accepted. *I can't believe this is happening. We have a job with a principal we both admire. We can continue the job-sharing arrangement. And we are free and encouraged to follow our philosophy and beliefs.* Steam from rain puddles drifts lazily upward, birds swoop and glide on the air currents, bees dive to meet each flower, and the blue silk sky stretches endlessly above the sun. The forecast looks terrific.

Reflection

In thinking about this experience, I believe I acted on some assumptions that were not totally correct. I see now that the involvement with the Wednesday class narrowed my vision of the entire school. I thought the process modeled in the Wednesday class of reading, sharing, and listening was automatically in place and embraced by all. The in-service reading day probably subconsciously reinforced this idea. So when the SFA issue arose, I turned to what I thought were communal strategies: reading, talking, and listening. I relied on the interaction between staff members to help everyone gain what I hoped would be new understandings. I've come to recognize these were my strategies, not theirs.

The other significant realization that has come to me over time is the recognition that I wanted everyone to agree to my thinking. I think this comes from my deep feeling for the issue at hand. I was not willing to compromise on SFA. I was willing to take a year and help construct a reading philosophy with others. I don't know how much I was willing to bend in that process, but I was willing to give it a try and work it through with other teachers.

In terms of community, I forgot that the fifteen participants of the Wednesday class were also members of the larger Richardson collective; members of committees, grade-level teammates, and teaching neighbors. I egotistically believed that because we were a community each week, they would consider my ideas.

It's interesting to note that all during the SFA consideration, the Wednesday class continued. The topic never really coincided with the book we were discussing, nor did any one of us bring it up. Like the first semester, the class included student teachers and the placement advisor from the university. **I shifted my focus. I no longer saw facilitating community as my purpose, but I retreated and assumed the typical role of course facilitator. For this reason, the Wednesday class became an island of neutral territory for everyone.**

CHAPTER 7

DISCOVERING COMMUNITY: UNWRAPPING SURPRISES FACILITATING A STATE RESEARCH COMMUNITY

Note to the Reader

The chapter begins with a post office metaphor that illustrates the overwhelmingly significant problem of distance with this particular community. I next share my initial introduction to the idea of teacher research, a history of the Alaska Teacher Research Network (ATRN), and my involvement with the organization.

In the main section of this chapter, I show my varied work in facilitating a statewide teacher research community. I base many of my actions on the lessons I learned from the parent community. I also build on my knowledge gained from facilitating the Richardson community to refine my role as facilitator and to tailor community building actions to fit the specific individuals. I still continue to use my five identified elements of community, but in a more condensed manner, to strengthen this teacher research collective. I learn to reframe my thinking about community to take into consideration the short time frames of each particular meeting and gathering. In each setting, I explain how I create links between participants with the larger statewide ATRN collective.

The chapter finishes with an account of an ATRN five-day retreat held in Fairbanks. In a recorded discussion, the members share their feelings on the importance of this community.

I have fond memories of the College Post Office. When Ken and I and our two sons moved to Alaska in 1973, the post office was our only link to our families. (We were too poor to phone.) During our first summer in Fairbanks, the boys and I walked to the post office every day to check our mail. It became a daily ritual that involved waiting until 2:00 p.m. for the new mail to be sorted, reading letters aloud on the return walk, or, if we didn't get news from home, consoling ourselves with orange popsicles from the corner store. We made the trip every day, regardless of the weather.

We were there so much the post office became our first Alaskan "family". We knew that Rita worked two jobs besides the one at the post office, Lou also picked up his mail every day the same as we did, and Sara always brought her three small children with her because her husband was working out of town for the summer. In October, my post office family expanded. Since all Christmas mail and packages had to be mailed by early October to reach families Outside in December, the post office lines were long. Boxes tied with string or wrapped with duct tape were stacked everywhere, and children created their own games as they played between the people, dogs, and packages as we adults chatted about the weather, the poor job situation, and the sadness of being so far from families. We got to know each other well that month. In December, we all saw each other again, but this time we were standing in line to pick up packages arriving from Outside. The packages and letters sent and received reminded us that we continued to be part of a larger family, and the post office provided a place to create a new family of supportive friends.

Many years later, the Alaska Teacher Research Network became my personal "post office". I didn't realize how much I needed a supportive educational community until I spent a summer in Hawaii. As a gift for completing my master's degree, my husband gave me an entire summer in Hawaii. This was the first summer in ten years that I wasn't going to school or teaching classes, and I was looking forward to having some leisure time.

After about two weeks of "free" days, I began to roam the beach, looking for possible teachers. Out of the corner of my eye, I would read sunbathers' book titles, longing to see something to do with teaching. I hung around the local school, hoping to meet the teachers as they left from summer school duty. I finally called the Hawaii National Writing Project and offered to teach "whatever they needed" during their five-week summer institute. They graciously invited me to attend, and I found a tropical teacher community.

At the end of the summer, as I left Hawaii and flew to Anchorage to attend the second Alaska Teacher Research Network seminar, I thought about my three months in Hawaii. *I had lots of time to think and reflect, but no one to share it with. Until now, my master's classes provided me with a conversation group, and now I know I need a consistent group of teacher-friends I can talk and dream with. If I need this, I wonder how many others also need it? I'll watch the teachers at this ATRN meeting. Maybe this will be what I need.* **It was from purely selfish reasons that I became active in ATRN. I needed a supportive intellectual community, so I set out to create one.**

My first taste of a professional community occurred during my participation in the Alaska State Writing Project in 1982. My response group was extremely supportive, and I left with writing confidence and a circle of professional friends. Some of us wanted to continue that feeling of support and camaraderie, so Shirley Kaltenbach, Claire Murphy, Dee Wilcox, and I met once a month for two years. We didn't always write, but we talked. We talked about school, students, writing, and publishing. Claire continually talked and talked and talked about publishing. She kept telling us, "We all have important things to say. We need to share it." We didn't believe her.

During a summer writing institute, Claire invited Perry Gilmore, a professor at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, to give a presentation on ethnographic research. Claire suggested that Shirley, Dee, and I attend the lecture. Afterwards we met with Perry to talk about this kind of research. Claire again talked about the importance of publishing our writing. We continued to just listen.

I remember my first introduction to the words "teacher research." In 1985, Donald Graves came to Fairbanks to teach a week-long class for past participants of the Alaska Writing Project. *I'm really nervous being in a class taught by Donald Graves. That must be him at the head of the table. He looks exactly like the character of Yoda from the "Star Wars" movie.* That was probably the most meaningful thought I had all week. He talked about teacher research; all fourteen members of the class nodded at the appropriate times. I didn't have a clue about what he was talking about. At the end of five days, we all said good-bye; Donald Graves flew home, and NONE of us did anything with teacher research. I realize now that I wasn't ready for the idea of teacher research. Yet. Claire kept talking, and I began to listen a little more closely.

In 1989, Claire approached the Alaska State Writing Consortium with the idea to teach a week-long seminar focusing on teacher research. With its support, Claire and Jack Campbell, another Alaska Writing Project fellow, invited Marian Mohr to get everything started. There were nineteen participants at this seminar in Anchorage. Unable to join them that first summer, I joined the seminar the following year after my summer in Hawaii.

The plane from Hawaii landed in Anchorage, and I walked through the airport, straining to see my teaching colleagues who were to meet me. As I picked up my luggage, I turned around and saw them. My whole world lit up. I was home.

Twenty-five teachers sat on metal chairs in a circle in the basement meeting room of a dormitory in Anchorage. Claire, our leader, welcomed us there, introduced Pat D'Arcy from England as our week-long research expert, and said, "Okay, let's begin. Let's go around the room and tell everyone what we would like to research this year." *Wait a minute, Claire. I don't know these people. I just got off a ten-hour flight. I haven't seen Pat D'Arcy in four years. Give me a minute! I don't even know what teacher research is yet. Slow down. We need to play together first.* Claire didn't slow down. We plunged right in. When I think back, I still don't know all the teachers' names, even though we spent a week together.

Monday night before going to sleep, I thought about how I would restructure the day if given the chance. *Like I do with the children in my classroom, we would purposely take time to know each other, even though our time together is limited. If I want to ever feel comfortable calling Karen in Juneau for help as Claire suggests we should, I need to know her first. We'd do something every morning to help us feel like a group. We need to laugh together. Maybe play some of those games the Richardson teachers and I played at the beginning of the Wednesday night class. And we need to celebrate together. All of us should be treated in a special way because we gave up our last week of summer vacation to be here; that's personal commitment. I want someone to tell me they're glad I'm here. If we don't find a way to become a family or community, we will lose everyone in this group once the rush and pressure of school begins.*

The week proceeded with vast amounts of information concerning teacher research. I talked and chatted with the few people I knew. Pat D'Arcy added some clarity to the muddy topic of teacher research. Last year's previous seminar participants shared their research. For me, the whole week was a blur and a rush.

On Thursday at breakfast, Jack and Claire announced, "We need one or two people who are willing to take a leadership role with ATRN. We've decided not to be the facilitators for next year." I considered this invitation and the possibilities. *Is this something I want to do? Teacher research has great possibilities. It's like the next step after the Writing Project and the Whole Language Institute. ATRN would offer a place for those people who wanted to continue to grow professionally. It could offer a professional community, too, if structured with that emphasis.* Before the end of the day, I volunteered to become one of the state co-coordinators for ATRN.

It has suddenly occurred to me as I'm writing this account of ATRN that I had no idea what I was doing. This was a brand-new organization with no structure, no history, no clear vision of the future. By the end of the week, I wasn't even sure I truly understood the concept of teacher research. Viscott, in *Risking* (1977) states that "Often when a person makes a commitment and puts his plans into actions, he begins to understand his risk for the first time" (p. 65). As I'm thinking about my actions at this point, I'm overwhelmed with my self-centeredness and my willingness to take such a huge risk.

On Friday afternoon, before everyone left, I managed to draft an outline of my personal agenda for ATRN:

1. Encourage professional growth. Build on the personal commitment I have to my students and their families to be knowledgeable about my profession. I can learn much from others, so it's important that others fee comfortable in joining this conversation.

2. Develop and encourage personal professionalism. I want to create an environment where being a teacher is valued and supported. A place where we can develop pride in who and what we are.

3. Create a strong, statewide community built with supportive people who will encourage and share. This can only happen if we know each other well. Because in Alaska we are so far from each other, I'll need to work to find ways to pull us together in spite of the distances.

4. Encourage teachers to trust who they are and to have faith in their abilities. Risk-taking is a part of this too. When we have faith in

ourselves, others will also have faith in us. It's a matter of learning who we are from our own reflections, not depending on the judgment of others.

5. Of all of these, community continues to be the most important. Without a sense of community, I feel the other goals would not last for any length of time.

Multiple ATRN Communities

As a new resident of Alaska, the post office served as place for maintaining and establishing connections. I remained a part of my family through the sending and receiving of letters, and I also created new friendships through my daily visits. Simultaneously, I was a member of two communities.

Within ATRN I also considered myself a member of multiple communities. I identified three distinct but interrelated communities within ATRN. *As co-facilitators, Jenine and I are a community of two as we learn to work together. Next, I am also a part of the state community of ATRN with members who are scattered from the northern areas past the Arctic Circle to the southern panhandle of Juneau. Finally there is the local community of teacher researchers in Fairbanks, who are my colleagues within the local school district. Each will need individual attention as I work to facilitate community in ATRN as a whole.* Each presented unique opportunities and challenges for developing and facilitating community.

A Co-Facilitator Community

On the last day of the Anchorage ATRN institute, both Jenine and I volunteered to work together as co-facilitators. *Wonder how this is going to work? I only met Jenine four days ago.* We spent about two hours of planning together before the seminar was over, and she headed for her home in Eagle River and I drove home to Fairbanks.

During the eight-hour drive home, I thought about how to begin to construct a community between the two of us. *I know that communities don't have to be defined by physical boundaries (Shaffer and Anundsen, 1993). My students' military parents frequently tell me they maintain their connections to the last neighborhood they lived in before moving here. I also know from beginning a community with my students that it starts with a relationship between the two of us. That's where Jenine and I will*

begin. If Jenine and I can create a successful community between the two of us, then I can use what I discover to help others in ATRN forge long-distance research communities. Working on the premise that "opportunities for community today are limited only by your imagination and the degree of your intention" (Shaffer and Anundsen, 1993, p 9), I set out to learn how to create a community between Jenine and I.

Communication, Consensus, and Challenges

The biggest challenges were distance and time. We lived six hundred miles apart and lived very busy lives. I began by calling her every two weeks. Our initial conversations focused on ATRN and teacher research, but the more we talked, the more the talk branched out to include our teaching experiences and personal lives. After four months, Jenine began calling me as frequently as I called her. *It's great to have her initiate the calls. It tells me she's feeling comfortable with our working relationship.*

The other challenge was in taking risks. ATRN was so new, it didn't have a previous structure or history to build upon. It was the perfect opportunity to create something totally new, but there was also my awareness that ATRN was being observed by fellow teachers, administrators, and other educators. *If ATRN is to be successful, Jenine and I need to be working in concert. We need to easily and honestly exchange our views in order to reach a common vision for this community.*

After reaching an ease in talking with each other, I began introducing some controversial topics that lurked around the edges of ATRN. *I think I'll call Jenine tonight and see what she thinks about separating the new teacher researchers from the more experienced ones. I heard this idea expressed during one of the lunches at the last summer seminar. I don't know how I feel about it; I wonder what she thinks.* **By bringing these types of issues out in the open with Jenine, I now realize two things. First, I was using Jenine to help me clarify my own thinking. Second, by recognizing and discussing these topics, Jenine and I were formulating our vision for ATRN. These types of discussions cemented our community of two.**

Celebration

Our celebration was the seminars and winter meetings. After months of thinking and planning, the ATRN gatherings became our visible party. Frequently during the week, we would find moments together to not only quickly reflect on the

mood, the pacing, and the agenda, but to congratulate each other on the obvious successes. **We were very quick to give each other praise for our efforts, and we felt good working together. I believe this feeling of success radiated outward to the other participants and helped to ease others into the ATRN community. I also believe Jenine and I provided a model for other ATRN members in finding and working with a supportive research partner.**

Through developing a working community with Jenine, I was actually sorting out those issues which would be important in my work with ATRN. Peterson points out that it is "through encounters with others that we determine what is of value" (80). In my relationship with Jenine, I attempted to live out my value of compassion and respect for the other over distance. Through our open discussions which invited opinions and attained concensus, I believe I found actions through which I could enable ATRN to strengthen it's state-wide community.

State Community

Receiving mail from relatives Outside reminded all of us in the post office line that we were connected to family and friends, that we weren't forgotten, and that we had a means to gain and share news. I wanted that same sense of connectedness for ATRN members. While the main emphasis of the Alaska Teacher Research Network was to introduce the idea of personal reflective study (teacher research) to the educators across the state of Alaska, I knew enough about teacher research to understand the importance of community (Hubbard & Powers,1993; Cochran-Smith & Lytle,1993; and Mohr & MacLean, 1987). Also from my experience within the Alaska State Writing Project, I fully understood the significance of collegial support in undertaking a change in practice.

Based on my knowledge gained from working with the parent community and the Richardson School community, Jenine and I carefully crafted and planned the summer seminar and the winter meetings. These were the two consistent times ATRN members gathered together each year.

Summer Seminar

Look at all these teachers sitting in hot tubs, reading No Exit *by Sartre (1989). I never thought they would do this.* The "this" was the statewide ATRN summer seminar in 1991. Jenine and I were co-facilitators, and this was the first day of the seminar. Fifteen teachers from across the state really were sitting in hot tubs,

lawn chairs, and towels reading a play—out loud, each assuming their character's role and ignoring the strange looks from tourists and the locals. Inwardly I smiled. *Jenine and I worked hard at structuring the first day. We both agreed that community was so important that we would take an entire day out of the five to attempt to create a strong bond among us all. We knew it would be difficult because the educators in this group were the strong, vocal, opinionated educational leaders in the state. Creating community with this group would be like trying to get bees to fly in formation and agree on the direction! But right now it seemed to be working. All the months of preparation were worth it.*

Climate and Communication

The ATRN group only has one week together. It's a more consistent time than my parent community, but not as long. I will need to use every minute. Are there ways I can combine the ideas I use with other communities to help us become a community in a short period of time?

In thinking about how most effectively to use the time in relation to the elements I discovered with the other communities, I realized there might be ways to help the ATRN members move more quickly into a community. Again I drew on my understanding of community from my past experience. *The climate is important. We need to move out of the traditional setting, break the attitude of the expected. Is there a way I could combine this with providing them an opportunity to get to know each other?* In sharing this idea with Jenine, we decided to spend the day at Parks Hot Springs, about fifty miles away from Fairbanks. Going to this resort was a way to meet in neutral territory. It would be like meeting in the research room for the Richardson Wednesday night class. The Parks Hot Springs would be away from school, away from classrooms, away from other work, away from home, away from everything but "us." It would also give everyone a common experience. **This was a huge risk in not only the time factor but also with the participants.** Knowing the ATRN members would come with the standard first day expectations, Jenine and I sent them letters explaining our travel plans. *In many ways, this letter writing is like what I do with my sixth graders. I'm trying to ease the ATRN members into a different way of viewing their involvement with us and with each other.*

We began the day by meeting at a local high school, randomly dividing into groups of four and five, piling into designated vehicles, and driving the fifty miles to Parks Hot Springs. In my planning, I wondered how we could use the hour-long

drive to Parks Hot Springs to help build positive communication. *I think we need to structure the talk in some way. The drive can seem long if one person is monopolizing the whole conversation or no one talks at all. We won't know everyone, and we need to figure out a way for everyone to have time to share. Jenine and I could create open-ended questions, type them up, and put them in plastic bags; then the day before our trip, we would drive down Parks Hot Springs Road and tie them with bright ribbon to trees. Each car would have to look for the bag, stop, read the question, and then talk about it until they found the next question. I'll call Jenine and see what she thinks.*

Jenine agreed, and on the Saturday night before the seminar began, we wrote questions ranging from "Describe your favorite meal" to "Who are your heroes, and why do you admire them?" On Sunday we hung plastic bags from trees, road signs, trail markers, and newspaper boxes. As Jenine and I drove along and taped bags, we talked about the possibility of the teachers not being willing to do this. *This is such a strong-willed group; they may decide not to do anything we have planned. What would we do if they wouldn't participate?* Jenine and I discussed possible optional plans just in case we had a revolt on Monday. **I realize now that this was one way Jenine and I were building community with each other. It's similar to the way my students and I built community within the classroom. Jenine and I had to be a community if we expected to build one. Community begins with the two of us and radiates outward to include the others in ATRN.**

I believe this is an example when I used my previous understandings about community, examined the challenges ahead and used my creativity to solve a problem. Covey (1989) points out that the "way we see things is the source of the way we think and the way we act (24). In identifing a place where community could possibly develop, I show that I'm actively seeking opportunities to help this particular community to strengthen and then responding to my thinking.

As the participants of the ATRN seminar pulled into the parking lot of the Parks Hot Springs Resort, Susan sprang out of her car and headed in my direction. "Someone took question #7! It wasn't in the bag! I want to know question #7. We didn't get to talk about it. It's totally unforgivable that someone did that." *Yea! Susan, the teacher with the strongest personality, bought in. Good deal. Now let's get on with the day!*

Consensus

We then met in the conference room, and after Jenine and I reviewed the week's agenda, we urged the teachers to form committees that would be responsible for helping the week-long gathering run smoothly. Ranging from a snack committee to a publication community, the participants stepped in and assumed responsibility. *What a group! They quickly covered all the bases for this community. They even thought about a gift for our guest speaker who will arrive tomorrow. It will be interesting to see if the rest of the week goes this smoothly.*

Three months before the summer seminar, I called Jenine. "What would happen if we didn't even talk about teacher research on the first day of the seminar? I think we need to spend time together before we plunge into studying."

"That's probably true. The hot springs has lots of hiking trails, that sort of thing. We could do that, but it would be hard for everyone to do at the same time. It really wouldn't be a shared experience."

"Maybe there's something else we could read together. You know, something we could all talk about that might have relevance to teacher research but not implicitly state 'teacher research'.

Upon Jenine's husband's recommendation, we decided to read *No Exit* by Sartre (1989). He assured us it was oblique enough to apply to any situation and still allow for a great discussion. *Since it's written like a play, we could break up into small groups and read it out loud. Then the teachers could read it in the hot tub, out on the trail, or wherever else they wanted. The groups should be different from the vehicle groups so they get to know others in the seminar.* The groups read in the hot tubs, read while reclining on lounge chairs, and read while perched atop clumps of moss along footpaths.

Traveling outside the perimeters of the traditional setting and then asking the particpants to read a play was an incredible risk to take. I only did it because I have the success of working with the parents and with the teachers in my building. Success in one area gave me courage to use the new understanding to extend my ideas in another.

Challenges

After lunch, I introduced Harvard Discussion. *I'm well aware of the strength of some of the members of this group. In some ways they are like the men in the Wednesday night class at Richardson Elementary who controlled the open discussion. I've been in classes with them before when they virtually dominated every*

verbal interaction, but if we're creating a research community, we need to honor and value all ideas, not just a few. We'll begin with Harvard Discussion and maybe discontinue it later in the week. Some will find this very difficult. Will they abide by the limitations, or will they charge on ahead anyway? I'm really nervous about working with this group. Harvard Discussion could be a significant event for us all. This could determine whether or not we'll become a focused community or just a group of people in the same room together for a week.

After I explained the guidelines of Harvard Discussion, the conversation began well. Then Susan ran out of tokens, and she attempted to "borrow" others so she could continue talking. *I'll treat it as a joke and get everyone to laugh. That way she can save face (Goffman, 1972), and I won't have to directly confront her. If the group supports me, then she'll be more inclined to follow the group's pressure to conform to the guidelines.* We all laughed at Susan's attempt to use more tokens, and it became an "inside" joke to "Watch out for Susan if she's sitting beside you during discussions." We finished the day with another cooperative activity and headed back to town.

Celebration

About thirty minutes later, we all stopped for pie at Tack's Country Store. Mary Lou suggested that we all order a different kind of pie to share with each other. Everyone agreed and began to order rapidly. *We have the beginning of a community—we're celebrating being together by sharing pies. I see the suggestion of sharing pies as a visual representation of my students using collective pronouns in their journals. It's the recognition of the existence of a collective whole. Now we're ready to begin examining the topic of teacher research.* Our first day together was referred to again and again throughout the week, and it became the event that held us together.

Although I didn't know it at the time, the first day of the seminar contained all the elements of community. The Parks Hot Springs environment set the climate. The hour ride began the communication process and the discussions sustained it. We reached consensus on the jobs. The challenges included Harvard discussion, which required the give and take of all the participants for the overall benefit gained from the discussion.

In coming together, we learned about each other though many cooperative activities, reading the play, and discussions. Jenine and I attempted

to share power through offering choices to the participants and being open to suggestions. We worked together by creating work committees, sharing insights about the play, and agreeing to publish a booklet of research proposals by the end of the week. Our celebration was sharing the pie at Tack's General Store. The rest of the week rested on the experiences we shared and the trust we created on our first day together.

Every gathering that Jenine and I planned as co-facilitators of ATRN for two and a half years was based on the Parks Hot Springs experience.

The Second Summer Seminar

The following summer, we again led a five-day teacher research seminar, this time located in Juneau. After talking and planning with Jenine, about a week before the gathering began, I again noted my personal expectations in my journal:

> Things I would like the participants to leave with after a week together:
>
> 1. To see the importance of professional reading, that these readings have merit and value to them on a personal level. Other teacher researchers have something important to say. I hope this leads into the idea that they have something important to say also. It's seeing a value in yourself.
>
> How: To consistently give time to reading and discussion, first thing in the morning when we're all fresh. To refer to articles and books within open discussions. Encouraging past participants to do the same. Referring participants to specific articles and books as questions or topics arise. I hope to do this through journal responses and personal discussions.
>
> 2. To see the importance of the support community. Unity gives strength and we take more risks. Teacher research is a high-risk activity. For participants to feel the strength and the breath of the group. We can all help each other; we are all resources.
>
> How: Daily cooperative games and singing to build unity. Staying together in Shiable Hall will help. Those who share a bathroom really get to know one another. Varying the reading groups will help also. By

the end of the week, everyone will have worked with everybody. Referring people to past participants for help. Again demonstrating that we all help each other.

3. Empowerment. Teacher research is empowering. When we examine and discover for ourselves truths in our teaching situations, then we have the power to make changes. Carefully and critically examining ourselves gives us incredible power as professionals. We can make decisions that are based on sound, well-thought-out theory. We can back up our beliefs. We don't have to rely on someone else to tell us why we teach the way we do.

How: Professional readings will help. Giving participants choices during the week. Treating them like professionals. Encouraging them to think through their proposals. Having past participants share their work, good and bad procedures, and final results. Being in a group of teachers who are concerned about their professionalism—sort of a collective energy radiating outward and enveloping everyone. The energy that happens is usually incredible.

Climate

I thought about last year's seminar. *The hot springs experience last yeas was so incredible. Within one day, we created a working cooperative community. How could I use a similar idea but expand it throughout the entire week? I think being in a nontraditional setting, physically away from family and the trappings that come from meeting in a school was extremely helpful.* Jenine and I found a large guest house on the University of Alaska Southeast's campus where all of the out-of-town participants could stay. The Juneau people chose to commute each day.

We shared the kitchen and took turns fixing meals. The large dining table became the focal point for gathering as we ate among stacks of books and piles of papers. The early morning walks and late night conversations provided opportunities for strengthening new friendships and for exploring teacher research ideas. *I wish everyone would stay at Shiable House. It's the midnight conversations and the early morning chats that build ties among people. We're only meeting for five days, so we*

need to create bonds quickly, and I've learned they have to be especially strong to withstand the distance in Alaska and the difficulty of teacher research.

Challenges

My first challenge of the second summer seminar was not specifically about ATRN, but personal. While I valued teacher research, the Juneau seminar came at a point in my life where I doubted my ability to conduct research and lead a seminar. The day before I flew to Juneau, I tried to clarify my concerns in my journal:

> I enter this week without much enthusiasm. I've not finished my paper for Far Vision and that makes me feel like I have let everyone down. [*The Far Vision, The Close Look* is ATRN's journal for publishing members' work. We attempt to publish the journal every two years.] I promised myself I would have it done. I've received many phone calls from participants full of energy and enthusiasm. I have none. I spent yesterday pulling everything together and still no sense of fun developed for this project. I'm hoping that when I get there the group energy will brighten me.
>
> In a book I read this morning, I found a quote from Ghandi: "A person cannot do right in one department whilst attempting to do wrong in a another department. Life is one indivisible whole." I believe this is true. Then what does the week hold? If I want the participants to gain empowerment, value professional reading, and value a support community, then I have to do all these things, too. I can't say one thing and believe another. How do I pull it together so this does happen? Focus. Finish the paper. Value the time being spent with others. Think about how to use my personal time to complete needed projects. Don't resent this week in Juneau. Pull on my reserve of energy. Take time to talk about this with my colleagues and use them for support.

My energy level and enthusiasm was low, and this seminar required more planning from both Jenine and I. The setting was unknown to both of us. We didn't have any insider knowledge as to the location of anything or what to expect in terms of the weather. Transportation was a challenge as Juneau can either be too foggy to

land or too cloudy to depart. We weren't sure until we all arrived who and how many would actually be participating. *I always absorb the excitement from others when we're together. I'll pack everything and trust.*

The other challenge with this summer seminar was the absence of a guest speaker or critical friend. In the past, we always felt the need for a critical friend for guidance. At this seminar, however, Jenine and I believed we had the expertise within the state to do it ourselves. Every experienced ATRN member volunteered to share part of the research process in relationship to their own research. **This was a large risk for Jenine and me but a turning point for ATRN. It was at this meeting that I realized that we could guide ourselves. We didn't need a known expert to tell us what to do next. We now had the knowledge and experience to offer to the new teacher researchers, and we had the vision to stretch the experienced teacher researchers.**

Communication

Building on the lessons learned from last year's seminar, we settled into the routine of the week. Twenty-four adults crowd in the living room area of Shiable House, sitting on the overstuffed furniture, dining room chairs, and the floor, some still munching toast and drinking coffee. Participants open their journals and write a morning entry. *Everyone writes with such earnestness. These are very dedicated teachers who want to know more about themselves and their profession. I feel privileged to be here with them. We'll write a bit more and then head outside for a wake-up activity.* Leaving their coffee on the tables, we head outside. The Juneau fog is beginning to clear as I explain the rules for playing a cooperative game. *It's good to hear the laughter as we play. We'll take a few minutes to talk before we go back in. The day is so lovely, it's going to be hard to be inside. Maybe we'll eat our lunch outside today.* We return to the living room, settle in, and listen to the presentations on identifying the research question and establishing a research design. After a lunch on the lawn, three past teacher researchers share their projects. *It's great to hear the experienced teachers share their successes and frustrations. Old and new teacher researchers alike need to hear this. On paper, teacher research sounds so clear, but in practice, it's messy.*

"Okay, let's meet in our discussion groups for the next thirty minutes or so. You might want to talk about your readings, the presentations, or the information shared this morning. It's up to you. After you're done, the afternoon is open. There

are many articles, journals, and books to examine on the table in the dining room. The library is down the road, and at 2:00 p.m. Karen, the librarian, is available to demonstrate the use of ERIC. You can meet her on the main floor by the reference desk. You can meet with colleagues, write, do whatever you feel is beneficial for you. Let's meet back here at 5:00 p.m. to talk about dinner arrangements. Have fun." *I think this is the best part of the week, the gift of time. Bonnie is organizing a trip to the library. Jenine is recommending some books for a discussion group about writing workshop. One discussion group is heading for the national park up the road. Our school staff meetings and in-service days should be like this.*

The rest of the week continued in this fashion, and on Friday as we shared our proposals for the next school year. We also identified two people we would continue to contact and support. *I'm surprised at some of the friendships that have developed. People have found like-minded souls scattered across the state. I do hope they stay in touch. It will add so much to their research and to them personally. Everyone now has a plan and two supporters. What a positive way to end the week.*

Pierce and Gilles (1993) contend that "There is nothing trivial about societal glue. This is the stuff from which communities are formed" (41). This is what I concentrated on during the week in Juneau. I attempted to identify places where I could apply glue. My mind continually raced to think ahead and spot those moments when I could change a normal activity into a communal one.

After a week of early morning walks, hours of professional reading, and listening to ATRN members share their knowledge with others, I left rested, encouraged, and ready to continue. I felt renewed in the focus of professional reading, support community, and empowerment. *I wonder if the others find ATRN as renewing as I do.* In the October issue of our ATRN newsletter, Bernie Sorenson, a Juneau teacher researcher, interviewed Valerie, a new ATRN member. Valerie addressed the importance of a continuing support community:

> But, like kids, we need to be fostered and nurtured. How this is done in ATRN is through the network. I know that I have an audience no matter what. I also know that we have each other for support. Finally, to be a real professional we must grow and be challenged. ATRN will provide you with an opportunity to grow and expand professionally by forcing you to think and reflect on your teaching. It has given me a lot of pride knowing I am a part of this group.

Everything appeared to be going well. Those I contacted in October and November were eagerly collecting data and were finding relevant articles in journals. Then winter arrived.

Winter Meetings

January at the post office is a depressing place to be. All the Christmas decorations are down, the darkness outside presses in, and the mail is not as frequent as in November and December. The boys and I still go to pick up our mail, but our enthusiasm is gone. We rush in and out; conversation is limited. It's a cold, dark time in Alaska, and the dark emphasizes the distance from family. The feeling of isolation takes over.

I'm in a slump with my research. ATRN needs to get together again—I need to get together again. I need to talk about where I am and what I've done, and I need help to see what to do next. I'll call Jenine. We'll plan a meeting in Anchorage in January. It's a central location, January is a dismal month, and Anchorage has tall buildings with good book shops. The meeting will encourage me to continue. **I didn't even ask the local ATRN people if they wanted to travel to Anchorage and meet with the others across the state. In fact, I didn't ask anyone; I told Jenine this is something that we should do. I just assumed that because I wanted to, everyone else did, too.**

Others must have felt the same, because twenty of us joined each other in one hotel room, sitting on the floor, propped up on the bed, leaning against the doors, and lined up on the sofa, listening intently to Janelle share her data collection methods. *It doesn't matter that we can't afford a place to meet. This is better. Look at everyone, knee to knee, eye to eye. Being close together is good. It allows us to have physical contact as well as mental contact. The energy in here is incredible. I can almost see it radiating from each of us and then being absorbed by everyone in the room. It's almost like soaking up the sun on the beach in Hawaii.* Initially I suggested that we divide into small groups to share our progress with our projects, but everyone wanted to hear everything. So we divided up the time equally and stayed together. *Togetherness outweighs efficiency. Terrific!*

The winter meetings now have a general format of sharing progress, reading and discussing articles, encouraging each other, taking in a play or concert in the evenings, and, of course, shopping, all within a Friday night and a full day on Saturday. **The weekend becomes the "Parks Hot Springs" experience in**

January. Climate, communication, consensus, challenges, and celebrations stuffed in a day and a half. The evening activity and the shopping are as important as the readings and discussions. Informal conversations, personal exploration of ideas, and "what do you think?" are set against a nonthreatening background of choosing a sweater or sharing the latest good book. These activities provide continuous threads that tie us together.

A Transition

In my letters home, I often wrote about my friends at the post office and the latest happenings in Alaska. In turn, while waiting in line, my post office friends heard about my relatives and the news from Outside. My two families were blending together, but gradually, the type of information I shared with each changed. In the letters to my family, I talked about the larger, more important family issues of Ken's job, possible Outside visits, and the boys' school progress. My post office family heard about the immediate events in my life—a flat tire, frozen pipes, chickenpox, and the chicken on sale at the grocery store.

The same thing occurred in ATRN. We found that having a strong governing board wasn't effective for the organization. The issue of power, decision making, and regional needs caused us to rethink our goals. At the winter meeting in 1994, we decided to emphasize strong local groups and have the ATRN board serve as a central information agency. The ATRN board would continue to publish our state journal and plan the winter meeting, while the local ATRN chapters would create their own agendas for supporting and sharing teacher research within their specific geographical region. *The statewide ATRN organization planted seeds all over the state, and now the seeds are spreading. Southeast, Kodiak, the Interior, western Alaska, and the North Slope now have teacher research groups started. Each, however, has different needs in terms of personal development. The size and diversity of our state has a lot to do with this, and we all teach in such different situations with different populations. If we can build strong local groups, they will be the best support for the individual teacher researchers. We have to be careful not to lose the "part of a larger community" feeling. The rural teachers especially need to feel part of a wider professional community.* **It's a precarious balance between the local groups and the larger organization. In ATRN, the local groups and the statewide group are essential and need the sense of community, but in different ways. It's an interesting combination of needing to be supported and nurtured as a**

beginning teacher research community as well as importance of each teacher research community supporting and nurturing ATRN as a whole. Each needs each other.

Fairbanks ATRN

In some ways, my local post office community became more important than my family far away. Lou recommended the best place to buy winter tires. Rita suggested that Ken might want to talk to Al at the lumber yard about a job. She heard "there might be a job opening." Sara and I shared pediatricians and babysitters. We supported and helped one another because we saw each other often and could offer immediate aid or encouragement.

I developed a corresponding feeling with my research family in Fairbanks. Since we saw each other at monthly ATRN meetings and other teacher gatherings, we came to know each other well. Through our monthly meetings, I attempted to recreate the climate, communication, consensus, challenges, and celebrations of Parks Hot Springs.

Climate

On the first Saturday of each month, Fairbanks ATRN members gather in my classroom. Student desks are pushed together to form a large rectangular table, gentle music is playing in the background, and the coffee pot is bubbling. At 10:00 a.m. teachers begin to arrive. The next half hour is used for an informal chatting time, and the official meeting starts at 10:30. Everyone contributes to the food: grapes, bagels, cookies, and melon fill the center of the table. Along with food, the table is soon covered with books, articles, journals, and pieces of writing. We eat, talk, and examine all the reading material. By 10:30, we turn on the photocopying machine "Just in case we find something significant." I set up my computer and ask, "Who wants to write the newsletter this morning?" Karen volunteers, Annie fills her coffee cup once more, and we're ready to begin.

Communication

On the plane trip home from England, three summers ago, I thought about my local ATRN group. *We have a core group of ten or so people each month, but we do lose people along the way. Maybe we should publish our own newsletter after each meeting and send that to people who couldn't make it to the meeting. That might*

encourage them to return next month, since they wouldn't feel so out of it. The newsletter could also be a place to share information, such as publishing opportunities. There are many in the group who could easily publish their work, and they need to know what's out there. Then maybe we could also include a suggested book or article to read. Make it brief, chatty, informal, and easy to read. I'll see what the group thinks.

After presenting the idea of the newsletter, Annie suggested that we add an hour on to the meeting and put it together after each meeting. By November, we found that the writer could quickly edit, revise, and print a finished copy within fifteen minutes after the meeting. I found it important to retain the voice and feeling of the meeting. If it's too polished, no one will want to write, and it gives a false picture of our Saturday together. In the first newsletter, Annie wrote,

> We plan to put out a quick newsletter every time we have our monthly meetings. You are reading an excellent example brought to you by your own Annie Keep-Barnes.

The newsletter really becomes the minutes of our meetings and usually begins by reviewing our discussions. In January:

> We discussed an article by Cynthia McAllister "Teaching Stories and Possible Classrooms: How Teacher Stories Shape Classroom Truths" (1994). We talked about failures we've had as teachers and teacher researchers. About how we more often see success stories instead of the stories that relate to moments in the classroom that were not successful. We need to hear both points of view.

Our meetings tend to focus on the disasters, while our writing centers on the successes. **We're able to share our doubts at the ATRN meetings because we are close, comfortable, and supportive with each other, but we're not willing to share those experiences with the world yet (Newkirk, 1992).**

> We are so busy with our everyday kinds of stuff that we don't take the time to write down our stories. "Concrete walls, rigid schedules", too, can keep us from sharing. Being a part of the ATRN groups gives us the opportunity to go beyond that.

Today's participants see themselves as part of a welcoming community. Yay!

> We feel a strong need to talk about what is happening to us. We talked about the nature of "chat." The function of chat and the hierarchy of chat and how it is discouraged in some schools. There are more important THINGS to do.

I recognized this several years ago, when I discovered that we were spending most of our meeting time "chatting". We all felt the urgent need to talk with listening colleagues since we couldn't do it within our work day, but I also realized we could "talk" away the whole morning. We resolved this by setting aside the first half hour for generalized talk, and the rest of the morning we focused on teacher research. I wonder if they see the relationship of chat as mentioned in the article to our group structure?

> We also talked about the educational discussion groups at our schools. How do you create collegial discussion groups without pushing your agenda? How do you select what to read?

It's nice to see some of the members considering leading a school discussion group. **We gain strength and take risks by being together and supporting each other.**

Along with our discussion, the newsletter reviews publishing opportunities and books to read:

> [March 1995] Terri shared a call for proposals from Heinemann that is looking for articles that reflect teaching the "hard to reach". The edited book is called *Meeting the Challenges*. She gave us copies of the request for proposals.

Many members of this group have pieces ready to publish. I want to keep reminding them that they can do this. It's not out of their realm; it's possible. I keep nudging.

Of course, we also discuss our research, our dilemmas, and our wanderings. The April newsletter recorded the following research projects:

> Barb Smith shared her first draft on her question, "How do classroom adaptations affect a special needs child?" Her paper will tell about her study of one child and the growth he has made, as well as reflecting on the changes she has gone through.
>
> Cindy Karns shared that she made a bulletin board on portfolios for Ryan Middle School teachers. There was an interesting mix of responses from teachers. She is looking at how to share information with other teachers and how teachers change. At this point she is collecting data and recording observations.
>
> Bonnie shared her ongoing research on collegiality. Her focus is how to build community and collegiality among building staffs. She is looking at staff development classes, both those she has conducted and the one conducted by Terri. One issue that came up in our discussion was who "owns" the ideas in teaching. We discussed the ethics of researching someone else's class.

The newsletter is a quick and easy way to stay in contact with each other, especially during the cold weather when it's difficult to travel. After the recorder revises the newsletter, a volunteer takes the letter, copies it, and mails it to each Fairbanks member the following week. At our September meeting, Karen commented on the effectiveness of the newsletter:

> I almost didn't come. I kept telling myself that I have to draw the line and say no somewhere, but the flyer kept drawing me. So I drove my usual two-hour drive, and now I'm glad I'm here because I need this community.

In October, I noted in my journal: "On the local level, our newsletter is great. At last week's in-service, two members said they really like it and they would be at the next meeting. (They missed the first two.) *It's nice to hear words of encouragement. I was afraid that the newsletter would get tossed aside. I'll share this*

at the next meeting. **It's easy to become complacent with a group that meets frequently. I need to continually explore new communication ideas that will pull us together and strengthen our affiliation with other ATRN members.**

Challenges

In my sixth-grade classroom, I sometimes create challenges to move the class closer together. The challenges I propose for the local ATRN chapter serve two purposes. The first, and where I place the most emphasis, is to create deeper ties among the members. The second is to nudge each member to professionally stretch and venture into new territory. Combined, the two challenges guide my actions and thinking as I plan for the Fairbanks ATRN members being together, coming together, and working together.

We have no problem in being together. We enjoy each other's company and could probably spend twenty years on a desert island together and never run out of topics of conversation. I am continually concerned about inviting new people into the group and helping them feel comfortable. After the September meeting, I recorded:

> It just felt good being together again. Ann was the newest member today. She came with Karen. We need to make sure she feels included and that we don't talk about people, etc. whom she doesn't know. We need to take time to fill her in. *[I don't want us to become like the teachers in my building who exclude so many others.]*

I recorded another concern in November:

> I'm worried about Sue. It was only her second time and our meeting seemed rather disjointed today. The meeting has got to have more meat to be worthwhile for her, I think. *[Sue is working on her master's degree. I know she needs some response time, so we'll schedule that in for next month. I'll write a note asking her if she wants to share her study in December.]*

This is a recurring theme in all our meetings. How can we welcome new teacher researchers and make them feel comfortable? During one meeting, we talked extensively of this concern:

"Can I bring up an issue before we read," Terry inquired and looked around the table. We all nodded. "It's just that I think we need new blood in this group. I'm afraid we're all getting stagnant because the same people come all the time. It's just a concern I have."

"Well," Karen began, "it makes me feel comfortable to see the same people. I'm more open and I think I share more."

"We've talked about this before, and we do have to remember that teacher research isn't for everyone," reminded Annie as she took another sip of her coffee. Everyone started talking at once, but Ann, our newest member spoke out, "Maybe we should think of the numbers that we touch rather than the number sitting around the table here. Think of all the students we come in contact with and how we affect them." *Yay, Ann is speaking up. As a new member she doesn't say much yet. Everyone has such definite opinions about this. We do need to invite new people in, and we really want to do that, but I think the group is also afraid of the changes that it will create.*

"That reminds me of something Alan Glatthorn told me in a letter last year," I add. "He said that we should love what we're doing and have fun and not to worry about who is there or not there. While I think teacher research is the greatest idea since wheels, and I think this group is absolutely the best, I also realize, like Annie said, that it's not for everyone."

"I do think it's an issue that we should continually examine," added Terry.

We all agreed that new people would be great, but that it's difficult to interest already busy teachers with another idea. *We have a desire to share the benefits of teacher research, but are unable to do so successfully. What brought us to teacher research, and shouldn't we be able to replicate this for others?* This discussion resurfaced many times throughout the year, and again at our last meeting of the year, a five-day retreat.

Barb began, "I keep thinking of all the teachers. There's got to be people out there that would do a good job of sharing and are doing neat things in their classroom. I know we're not the only ones. There's got to be a way to draw them in here so they can share. I'm not sure what it is yet." *Good, Barb is considering ways to expand the group. She's taking a more active stance than she has before.*

"Well," Ruth added, "if you have these discussion groups at many of your schools, it doesn't mean that all would be interested in taking it further, but maybe you could try having a weekend beginners' retreat. Just for people who are interested

and it would just be Friday night, all day Saturday and a bit on Sunday." *If we offered a weekend seminar, then these members would need to help shape the agenda and present during the weekend. It would be very good practice for us all and prepare us for a wider audience in sharing.*

"That would give them a taste," continued Ruth, "and maybe they could just be brainstorming what their questions might be and just beginning to think about how they might start to observe in their classroom and collect stuff with an eye toward taking a beginning basic course in the summer, but it would be like an introduction for them or something. And that might draw them in." *Ruth always has such a gentle way of inviting people in. I would like to spend time watching her teach.*

"I read a book called *Global Paradox,* by Naisbitt" (1995), Karen added. "He says to think small. Small is the future, and personally I don't think big is all that great. It's unwieldy and with large numbers, you get people who aren't that committed. If you're small, probably everybody there is excited." *Karen definitely feels better with a small group. She's shared this with the group before. We need to figure out a way to balance Karen's concern and the urge to increase participant numbers.*

As we come together each month to share our research, we also continually struggle with the political ideas as well. Ways to expand teacher research; ways to deal with colleagues, parents, and the administration; and ways to remain honest and ethical in our teaching practice and writing fill the edges of our conversations. *We've yet to resolve any issue, but the conversation is our exploration in difficult and tricky areas.* In December, we talked about a new school opening in our district and the announcement of the new principal. We had hoped for a more liberal principal so that we could propose a school within a school of teacher researchers. My question was, "Do we want to form our own private school?" We spent time listing the pros and cons and decided to see if the charter school bill would be passed in the state legislature in the spring. *How strongly do we believe what we say? Are we willing to take the risk? The idea is germinating. Will we have the courage to do this?* Little did I realize that two years later, four of us would open Chinook Charter School based on the idea of reflective inquiry for teachers and students.

Celebration

In 1993, I suggested we host a statewide conference for teacher researchers. The Fairbanks ATRN members took the challenge and created the first Northern

Voices: A Research Forum. We did everything, from advertisements to preparing lunches for seventy-five attendees. The following year, we again offered the forum, but this time to a smaller number.

In January, as spring approached (*we are exceedingly optimistic*), we talked again about the Northern Voices Forum. The information in the newsletter recorded our indecision:

> Do we want to do it? We need to talk about it at our winter meeting. Annie's feeling is to have the emphasis placed on a basic research institute. Maybe we need to have a statewide basic seminar again? What do we want? What do we need? Not every teacher is going to do this. Maybe a retreat for teacher researchers early in June, maybe in Anderson. . . . Possible speakers? Ruth Hubbard? We discussed the possibility of Salcha and Terri's house as other retreat places.

We all seem so tired this spring. It's been a long winter with difficult contract negotiations, a threat of a strike, and community misunderstanding. I know I have doubts about my energy level needed for the forum. We need to do something for ourselves. A retreat may be just the thing. In April, we announced in a bright blue flyer:

Announcing the First Ever

Alaska Teacher Research Network Summer Retreat

with special guest

Ruth Hubbard

coauthor of *The Art of Classroom Inquiry* & co-editor of the *Journal of Classroom Research*

Place: Beautiful, sunny Fairbanks, at the Austin "Research, Recovery, and Retreat Center" (AKA, Terri's house).

Dates: Sunday, June 4 to Friday, June 9

Cost: $150.00 (includes housing, meals, a large library, and Ruth)

Credit: 2 or 3 credits (500 level) pending approval (additional fee for credit)

Who are teacher researchers? YOU may be. To find out take this simple quiz.

1. Are you curious about your classroom and what practices seem to work well with your students? yes or no _____

2. Do you look reflectively at yourself and your students in order to better inform your classroom practice? yes or no _____

3. Have you found that research done in artificial environments does not meet your needs? yes or no_____

4. Do you have stories to tell about learning that other teachers need to hear? yes or no _____

Add up your score. Four: Grab your tape recorder, you're eager for a research project. Three: Reflection is your thing, come join us. Two: New questions intrigue you; you're ready to tackle current educational issues. One: As a practicing teacher, a new perspective is in your future. Zero: Come join us anyway—we're a bit strange, but fun.

We guarantee a week of reading great professional materials, working with experts in classroom research, good food, and lots of fresh air and entertainment. (This is a very casual affair. Some of us will be sleeping on the floor, and all of us will be sharing bathrooms.)

Space is limited to the first 15 people who register.

Send registration and $25.00 (write your check to Terri Austin—ATRN) to:

Annie Keep-Barnes

We decided to sponsor a five-day retreat for our own enjoyment and benefit. Barb, Cindee, Bonnie, and Annie reflected on this endeavor the last evening of the retreat.

Annie: When we were all tired this spring, we decided to do something nice for ourselves. And this was no work for anybody except for Ken, but the workload was minimal. I mean, you know how hard we worked for those two forums.

It was nice not to have to kill ourselves for the forum. I miss the excitement of the presentations and speakers, but for this experienced group of teacher researchers, this week was ideal.

Cindee: Oh, yeah!

Barb: I kept wondering when the shoe was going to fall here. I was waiting for somebody to call and say, "Oh, here's your list, you need to do this, this, and this." Nothing happened.

Bonnie: Well, I don't think we need to feel hesitant about not doing this every year.

Cindee: As long as Ken can handle it. [Lots of laughter.]

Ken did all the cooking and food shopping. He kept us wonderfully fed all week.

Barb: And also, if Terri wants to give her house up each time and that kind of thing.

The retreat is my gift to everyone in ATRN—my house, my library, and my great cook, Ken. Everyone works so hard during the school year, they deserve a carefree, relaxing week. I admire them for their dedication.

Annie: Yeah, for this point in my life, this is exactly what I needed. [All agree.]

Me too. I needed time to take a breath and see where I was. I also wanted to get a feel from this group about where we need to go next. After this week, the confidence is high. I would like some of them to become more public with their research, either to publish in Ruth's journal or present at a state conference. I think we are ready to step out further into the national and international research community.

That last evening, we talked about our week together, beginning with a general question of "What was good?"

Annie: The food.

Ruth: The atmosphere.

Karen: The ambiance.

Annie: Writing time and I really enjoyed our morning reading aloud and just reflecting. [Agreement by all.]

We began our day just like I do in my classroom by reading aloud. I enjoyed listening to all the different voices as we took turns reading paragraphs. **The common reading pulled us together to face the day of researching by offering us something to discuss and by requiring us to assemble together.**

Cindee: It was strange how the reading always seemed to fit in with whatever I was thinking about later in the day, even though we read out of a different book every day. The reading didn't matter, it just kind of fit it.

Annie: And how the reading topic came out in whatever I read that morning, it also came out in my writing in the afternoon.

Karen: Well, the library was one of my favorites.

I knew she would like the books. She read a lot last year when she stayed with me. She has a wonderful way of pulling together ideas from many different sources and sharing them with us at unexpected times.

Barb: I got a lot of ideas about books to read. I have a list now.

Karen: And I was able to peruse (through) a lot of books and see which one I didn't want to order. That was good for me.

Cindee: It was nice not to have to bring all my books 'cause I knew Terri had them all.

Bonnie: It was nice to have a structure but have it loose enough that you could or could not participate. You could do whatever you wanted to do within that loose structure. Whatever fit your wants.

That was the purpose of constructing the agenda together on Sunday evening. The week needed to be semistructured to allow each person to reach her goal for the week but unstructured enough to allow for flexibility.

Barb: It was interesting because you didn't feel guilty. If you were really tired you could go take a rest 'cause you might have stayed up late working.

I went to sleep listening to Barb and Karen read to each other.

Barb: I didn't feel guilty about taking naps, but at the same time, I got an awful lot done. I liked being able to talk to everybody, 'cause I can't write and get much accomplished without being able to ask somebody to read and having the response for all the writing. I think that's why I got a lot done. I wouldn't have gotten that much done if I had all those days at home by myself.

Annie: No, and by being home, I would have been weeding the garden, mowing the lawn. Well, you, too. And so, even coming thirty miles from home and seeing my family four times while I was here, I still felt like I was doing this just for me.

Cindee: I liked the part where I would be reading something or somebody else would be reading something and say, "Hey, this fits what you're doing." You're not just reading for yourself, because you have all these other people in the back of your head. You're thinking about what they need, too. So that's really good.

Ah! This is a sure sign of community, thinking of others while you work. This is great!

Annie: I really like how [even though] it was a pretty loose structure, in that you could do what you wanted in the time. We were good about keeping to the overall schedule, you know.

Barb: Especially the writing time. I think we played with everything else, but the writing time was right on.

Annie: And we had agreed from the beginning that was going to be sacred. And we kept it sacred, and I think it was that we all cared that we had that time.

We all have a great feeling of accomplishment from the week.

Bonnie: I thought it was so neat—it must have been yesterday or the day before, that everybody was working in all parts of the house. You could hear a pin drop. It was wonderful.

I, too, noticed this. This is a literary convent! Maybe we're on to something here.

Ruth: There was that writing energy. You could just feel it.

Bonnie: It's neat to be a part of that.

It was.

We applauded our week-long efforts as we reflected on our personal growth. With exception of Ruth Hubbard, we were all local members of ATRN and supporting each other for at least four years. Ruth is our long-distance member.

Annie: You know what else is kind of interesting as I'm kind of watching myself. I wish I could document this, and I'm also watching you guys grow up as researchers. You know, we're all growing up a little, and so it's cool. I'm watching myself and I've seen it. I feel like I'm growing up. I'm not there yet, but . . .

Cindee: I wrote a bibliography for the first time.

Annie: And, yeah, I'm watching you grow up, and you grow up, and you. . . . It's cool. It's sort of like being children together.

The retreat became our celebration this year.

Reflection

And we continue to grow up. In the summer of 1996, five of us traveled to Herstmonceux Castle in East Sussex, England, to take part in the First International Conference on Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices. We presented "Gretel and Hansel, Research In the Woods: A Modern Fairy Tale" (Austin, Gaborik, Keep-Barnes, McCracken, & Smith, 1996), an original play about ATRN's development. In the fall of 1996, four of us opened the first elementary charter school in Alaska. Chinook Charter School, located in Fairbanks, is built upon our convictions as teacher researchers. Through reflecting, questioning, discussing, reading, and writing, we work to improve our practice and our knowledge as professional educators.

The issue of inviting new teachers to join us and while meeting the needs of the more experienced researchers continued to bother me. I alone never was able to fully resolve the issue.

I grew up during the years the boys and I visited the post office. In the beginning I relied on my family letters for advice and guidance. Later, as my post office community grew, I depended on its knowledge to help me solve problems. Later I realized the importance of sharing whatever knowledge I had with others. It was my responsibility to help others as I was helped.

CHAPTER 8
LIVING COMMUNITY: A GRAND ADVENTURE
ADDITIONAL THOUGHTS AND IMPLICATIONS

Note to the Reader

This chapter begins with still another letter to you. The purpose of this note to make sure we're still together as I draw conclusions concerning my study. I begin by pointing out my initial assumptions, then give a brief review of my inquiry, and next move into my present thoughts concerning community.

In the next section of this chapter, I thoroughly discuss my two original contributions to the educational profession. In each of my claims focusing on my knowledge creation and construction of an alternative form of criticism, I illustrate how I use creativity to attempt to fully live out my values.

The chapter finishes with bringing you into the present by sharing my involvement in two new communities. The first is a charter school where, as a co-founder, I incorporated many facets of community learned through this inquiry. The second community is a restructured ATRN again based on knowledge gained from this study. Both offer new challenges in thinking about community. The chapter concludes with a personal note to you with the hope we will continue the community we've established through the interaction of the ideas presented in this thesis.

Dear Reader, ATRN Members and Bath Fellows,

As we reach this chapter, I'm wondering how best to bring our journey together to a pause. I'm suggesting a pause rather than an end because I'm hoping we will continue together in some way, either through direct interaction or through playing with the thoughts and the ideas presented within this thesis. As I've recorded my work here, there have been many times when I wished we could have sat down together and just talked. This again is one of those times.

Throughout the writing of this thesis, you've been with me. You've been with me as I walked through the flower-filled gardens in Bath, as I wandered through the birch and pine forests in Alaska, and on all the transatlantic flights in between. I've continually questioned "you" about what you needed to know next to fully understand my work, if my writing was clear enough, and whether or not my work was in some way helpful or beneficial. So in this section, I envision us warming our toes next to my wood stove, calming ourselves with soothing tea, and discussing this study we've shared together.

I've thought of many ways for us to structure this discussion and finally decided that we should begin where I started with my initial desires, then have a brief review of my research, move to my current thoughts about my work, a look at what I believe are my original contributions to knowledge, and end with some broader implications for myself, you, and other readers of this text.

My Beginning

I began this study with a few desires and a basic assumption. I had a strong desire to understand how to create a community within my classroom. I wanted to understand how I could help my students work and learn together. I also wanted to extend my ideas about community to adult groups. I had some experience in working with adults through the Alaska Writing Project and as a facilitator of continuing development classes within my school district, so I wasn't necessarily a novice in this area. What was different about my work with parents, teachers, and colleagues was my focused agenda on building community and the developing awareness of the importance of and the implications of living my values.

My basic assumption focused on my own ability. I entered this study with the firm belief that I could find a way to consistently construct a positive community with my students. I also felt that I could adapt those same actions to create a community

with the parents, with the teachers in my building, and with my researcher colleagues across the state.

A Brief Review of My Study

As I reflect on these efforts, I now realize that with the students in my classroom I indeed was able to create a community. Building on the work of Roger and David Johnson (1982, 1987, 1990) and Elizabeth Cohen (1994), I moved beyond specifically teaching cooperative strategies to a natural integration approach. By melding the knowledge about interaction patterns (Goffman, 1972, Grice, 1975), proxemics (Hall, 1966), and kinesics (Birdwhistell, 1970), I learned to "read" the individuals so I could adapt my interactions and my instruction to nurture and help develop the community.

With the three other communities, I used similar techniques to foster a sense of community; however, my intentions were sometimes more intentionally visible. I scheduled getting-acquainted games, for example, because I understood the farther reaching results. At other times, I gently and quietly nudged the development of community through organizational ideas, such as partner work, writing, and opportunities for sharing, again because of my understanding gained from my work with my students.

While my focus was specifically to build community with the three adult groups, my purpose for doing so was different for each. My initial purpose in wishing to create a parent community was to enhance a connection between school and home. In studying Epstein's (1993) five categories of parent involvement (parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, and representing other parents), I realized I needed to work within the framework of my influence, so I focused on communication. I extended her idea of positive communication by creating a variety of interactive ways to incorporate parents into a community setting.

At Richardson Elementary, my purpose was to see if I could facilitate a professional community among a diverse group of educators. I do believe the participants of the class came together as a community during that one hour each week, and the comments from the participants interviewed support this idea. My study was interrupted and overwhelmed, however, by the process of adoption of the new reading program. This led to my leaving the school, so I'm unsure whether my attempts to facilitate a community had any lasting effects.

With ATRN, I knew I wanted to participate in a supportive professional organization. As a single teacher researcher at my school, I realized the implications of working on one's own and the need to have feedback and support from fellow researchers (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 1996). Some in the business profession suggest that creating identity and a unique culture is a way to build cohesiveness and sustainability (Peters & Waterman, 1982; Senge, 1990). It does not address how to accomplish this task if the majority of the people meet only for a week, once a year. My work with ATRN shows how I attempted to address this problem.

My Current Thinking

Work with each community provided me with a multitude of new understandings about community and about myself. I've changed my thinking about the creation of classroom communities. I inferred from reading the work of cooperative experts, such as Johnson, Johnson, and Holubec (1986), Elizabeth Cohen (1994), and Spencer Kagan (1992) that all I needed was a set of guiding actions: begin with whole group activities, move into partner work, then reconfigure into small-group projects. Using a set pattern of strategies such as these, I believed I could create a positive, cohesive, inclusive community each year with each new group of students.

While these guidelines provided me with a good beginning, it wasn't enough to create the type of community I envisioned. I wanted something more than peaceful cooperation on a math game. I now realize I wanted the students to enjoy being with each other and with me, I wanted to know them and about them more than the typical school day normally allows, and I wanted them to feel at ease in the school setting.

As I worked on creating communities with various groups of children, I came to realize the importance of those relationships. It not only makes life meaningful in the classroom (Noblitt, Rogers, & McCadden, 1995), but it allows me to draw on those connections when the learning becomes more difficult or when situations demand I require more from the students. Covey's (1989) analogy of this being like banking deposits and banking withdrawals is an apt one. Over time I understood the ramifications of working purposely to strengthen the relationships within the community. I realized I didn't "whip the kids into shape" as other teachers believed I did, but I created trusting, caring relationships so I could ask more of my students in all areas. This study shows one way in which these relationships can be developed within a classroom (Chaskin & Rauner, 1995; Noddings, 1991)

With my students, I came to realize the overwhelming amount of power I hold. I have the power to make life wonderful or miserable for each student. That is both a daunting yet humbling realization. How I structure the classroom, the interaction patterns, and my feedback will strongly effect every one of my students. I've learned to be exceedingly mindful about my actions.

The classroom also provided me the opportunity to sharpen my kidwatching (Goodman, 1986) perceptions. It was here, with my daily twenty-five or so, that I learned to take the temperature of the class, rummage in my brain for an idea, adapt my actions, assess the situation, and begin the process again—all done within a minute or so (Schon, 1983). I extended that process to people-watching, including adults as well as children.

It was also within the classroom that I became a teacher researcher. I used the safe environment I created for the children for my own professional growth. I learned to take risks, question myself, critically examine situations, and look beyond the obvious, all things I ultimately asked of my students. The classroom community was as much for me as for my pupils.

My work facilitating a parent community was a turning point in my study for a couple of reasons. First, I learned the importance of identifying a specific question to guide my inquiry. Initially in this part of my study, I was following what others had done and not doing my own critical thinking. While I followed Ruth Hubbard and Brenda Power's (1993) advice of seeking a question built on a tension, I wasn't able to define it clearly enough at the start of this portion of my inquiry.

Second, I realized I could facilitate a community with adults, but not necessarily create one. The relationships are different. Within my classroom, I am still in a power position no matter how much I share with students. With adults, I, as a facilitator, only have as much authority as they choose to share with me (Kouzes & Posner, 1993).

At Richardson Elementary, I learned two hard lessons. The first involves the realization that outside forces are a major factor on school life. I knew that from the many years of working within the district, but the Success For All program, which originated from outside the school itself, brought it clearly to my consciousness. For me, the imposed reading program did not recognize any of the knowledge I had gained from all my previous literacy teaching experience. In addition, the program required tracking and sorting students according to ability, which worked against the supportive community environment created in my classroom. These proved to be the

two issues that created the most conflict for me. The second lesson was that creating lasting change was a nebulous and elusive concept. I realized I could model and offer opportunities, but, as Sarason (1993) points out, change depends on many more aspects than individual desire.

In many ways, ATRN challenged my thinking more than any of the other communities, but through the challenges I learned the value of expediency, flexibility, and openness. Time was a major factor for all. Participants only had one week to gain what they needed to either be welcomed into the work of teacher research or to become more insightful researchers. Finding ways to include the new researchers and engage the experienced ones continued to be a dilemma for me throughout all the institutes and meetings. I only had a limited amount of time to help fulfill these needs as well as enable the teacher researchers to become acquainted, build trust, and feel like part of the existing community. In no other community did time play such an important role. I drew on every bit of community knowledge I had to help facilitate such a diverse group of people.

By the second year, I realized the ATRN meetings were most successful when other researchers helped in the planning. Important changes in my thinking occurred at this point. First, it was during these small planning meetings that I had the opportunity to begin to verbally articulate my understandings about facilitating community, and begin to clarify my own understanding (Barnes, 1992; Pierce & Gilles, 1993).

By sharing my work-in-progress in this fashion, I was also openly displaying my thinking. As I saw the consequence of talking about my uncertain thinking as well as the sureties in my inquiry, I suddenly understood Tom Newkirk's admonition to dispel the super-researcher myth (1992). Our ATRN discussions began to broaden and include previously silent struggles within teacher research. This prompted me to take more risks in all facets of my inquiry.

I see now that I was also modeling a way to include others. By trying to make my thinking visible, I was inviting others in and creating a personal relationship with them. The way this thesis is written is one result of this realization.

Original Contributions

In the beginning of this thesis, I made two claims for making original contributions to our profession: my creation of my own knowledge and the creation of an alternative form of criticism.

Creating My Own Knowledge: Moving Forward By Questioning

I believe this thesis presents a dynamic living picture of me, as an educator and individual, examining my own practice. I've attempted to show my progression of understandings as I created and facilitated communities, as well as show the process of recognizing my values and of striving to live out those standards in relationships with pupils, parents, and fellow colleagues and researchers.

I demonstrate in this thesis how I combine and recombine practice, personal creativity, intuition, and theoretical frameworks in various degrees at different times to generate fresh knowledge as I sought to create and facilitate the growth of the four communities. I've tried to open up the present, to bring you into the moment, so that you could live the situation with me. Stephen Glazer (1999), in discussing how to educate for the moment, says, "This approach requires a kind of nimble gentleness. It requires openness. It asks us to be on the spot. It depends on our awareness, sense of presence and sensitivity" (p. 186). I believe I am able to show Glazer's elements through my narrative, my thoughts and my continued self questioning, as well as illustrate how the awareness of my values influences my actions during individual moments.

Through the realization of myself as a living contradiction (Whitehead, 1993), I've attempted to show how I identify my values and then try to align my actions to those beliefs. Building upon the idea of the importance of personal knowing (Loughran & Northfield, 1996), I worked though a process of defining my beliefs in conjunction with my research work on community. I show how by asking hard questions of myself, I dig deeply into the beliefs that shape my actions.

As Loughran and Russell's (1997) accounts demonstrate, professional and personal lives are filled with tensions, challenges and contradictions. But it was through the process of critically examining my dissonant moments that I was more able to communicate to myself, and ultimately to you, the values that I use as standards of practice. This thesis demonstrates how I bring the unconscious to the forefront and make it visible.

I believe this thesis also offers an answer to the question posed by Hamilton and Pinnegar (1998), "How do self-studies lead to a reconceptualization of teaching practice?" (p. 4). I've demonstrated my change as an educator as I learned to step off stage and develop alongside my students and colleagues, as I learned to open my practice as well as myself to others, as I learned the importance of simultaneously

considering the individual and the group, as I learned to "peoplewatch" to inform my actions, and as I learned what I believe. Most importantly, I learned that I highly value relationships with others. This realization alone has significantly changed my practice and continues to influence everything I do.

An Alternative Form of Criticism: Living My Values Through Representation

In this thesis, I wished to present an alternative to traditional criticism usually found in academic work. I believe my identification and use of language, positioning, interest, and space allowed me to consciously and purposely construct another way in which to interact with the ideas of others in a way that allows me to fully live my values.

Through specific language choice, I tried to replicate, throughout this text, similar communication patterns I had with the participants in each of the four communities. I continually used words to draw you into a relationship with me as I shared my stories, thinking, and new conclusions. Another aspect of drawing you closer was through the use of the Alaskan stories and metaphors. Not only did they provide a unifying theme, but they also allowed me to open my life to you. I attempted to model, through text, a relationship pattern I used with all four of the communities discussed in this thesis. By sharing my stories, I openly invited you into my life.

I worked extremely hard with the concept of positioning. I wanted this work to live my values. I realized at the beginning of writing this thesis that I did not wish to engage in the argumentative, polarized discussions I often read in traditional research (Tannen, 1998; Donmoyer, 1996; Desforge, 2000) but rather wanted to create a document that would reflect and model my values and my belief in community. I believe I have accomplished this by emphasizing the relationship of ideas. By noting how others have stimulated my thinking, how I've adapted aspects of their thinking to fit my context, and how I've blended my ideas with theirs, plus showing how this led me to new understandings, I feel I have created a document that honors my values and beliefs.

Interest combines my focus on identifying and living my values in conjunction with community. Again, it's through the construction of this text that I highlight that emphasis for you, the reader. I attempted to draw you into my thinking and focus on those moments when I questioned myself in relation to my values and

actions. It is within these examples that I endeavored to illustrate my interest and sensitivity in community (Chomsky, 2000).

With space, I believe there is a place for multiple voices within the educational field as suggested by Eisner, Denzin and Lincoln (1994) and as demonstrated by other teacher researchers (Austin, et al., 1996; Cole, Brown, Buttignole, & Knowles, 1999; Cole & McIntyre, 1998). Charles Desforge (2000) recently recommended that educators would benefit from embracing multiple perspectives rather than disagreeing over individual theories. In an attempt to embrace Desforge's ideas of welcoming multiple perspectives, I share this thesis not only in an attempt to add another and different voice to educational discussion, but also as an educator who values, demonstrates, and lives the concepts of community. This thesis is constructed with that focus and with the hope the ideas shared here will add to further discussions.

Implications

Steven Glazer's (1999) question, "Knowing what we know (and also not knowing what will come next), what will we do?" (p. 185–186) is a good place to begin this part of our conversation. I began with the intent of examining how to create community within my classroom. I believe I accomplished that with my students, but I do have questions remaining. How are classroom communities created in other settings, other contexts, and other age groups? What other elements need to be considered? In what ways do race, gender, and socioeconomic status influence the creation of communities? With the popularity of multiage classrooms growing, how are classroom communities sustained over time? Is it possible for entire schools to create positive, long-lasting communities?

With parents, I worked to establish better communication, and ultimately a better relationship with each family, by offering a variety of interactional means. Kaltenbach's (1999) recent study supports the need for that type of variety. So, what are other more efficient or more effective ways to create easy communication between parent and teacher? I spent much time facilitating a community with parents, much of it out of school. Is developing a community with parents too large a task for a single teacher? Some schools now have social workers who perform this role. Is that more effective? What is gained or lost by having a third party create the relationship between home and school?

In my school setting, I wanted to see if I could facilitate a professional community with a group of diverse educators. Initially, I thought I would spend at

least two years working to facilitate a growing community with my peers. My vision was interrupted, however, when the issue of the reading program enveloped the school. What are the implications when teachers don't "buy in" to an imposed program? How does the social structure of the school impact teacher change? How do critical events in the life of a school affect teacher relationships?

With ATRN, I worked to create a strong community within the limits of time and distance. How do other self-supporting teacher research groups sustain over time? How do they construct a community that encourages and intellectually stimulates both the beginning teacher researcher and the experienced teacher researcher? How does being a member of a supportive teacher research community affect the classroom community and/or individual students?

My interest in community continues. After leaving Richardson Elementary and spending a year at another school in the district, three other fellow teacher researchers and I had the opportunity to develop a charter school. As a charter school (which is a public school using public funds), the four of us undertook the task of creating a new school with few restraints from the local, state or federal government. We took many of the ideas shared in this thesis and incorporated them on a school-wide basis.

We are beginning our fourth year and continue to examine our practice and refine our thinking about community. We have created small multiage communities that we call family groups. These groups provide support and encouragement for the individual student. The individual family groups also support the larger school community in various ways, such as tutoring younger students, filling in for the secretary as necessary, selling lunches, and offering after-school care.

We've also broadened our view of a parent community. Initially we attempted to draw our parents into a community like I described in this thesis. Now, however, we've expanded our views of that relationship and are beginning to view parents as partners in our discussions and decisions concerning the school.

There are only five of us (we added an additional teacher during our second year) as teachers in the school. With no administrator, we make all decisions concerning every aspect of the school by consensus. It's been hard at times. Teaching full time, reflecting upon our work, encouraging a family community, being political when necessary, and doing administrative work fills every minute and more, leaving little time for a personal life. We are learning how to sustain this community among ourselves even when we are

sometimes are impatient, tired, and overwhelmed. What gets us through the difficult times is the steady fact that we respect and care for each other.

We have two more years before we will renew our charter. That will be a time for us to reexamine our beliefs and goals for the school. I would imagine it will also be time for us to individually reflect on our past work and determine our future vision.

ATRN continues in its eighth year, transformed in its structure but still dedicated to reflective inquiry. Currently, a group of eight or so teacher researchers continue in Fairbanks. The ATRN community in Juneau has been adopted and absorbed into the Breadloaf Writing Program, sponsored by Middlebury College in Vermont. I know of only one teacher researcher located in rural Alaska who identifies herself with the ATRN community. This has been a reoccurring topic of conversation for over a year.

We wish to encourage new teacher researchers, but also, from experience, we realize that trying to incorporate interested teachers into an existing community might be our problem. Next year, we're trying a new approach. Each of us will mentor a new small group of beginning teacher researchers. We'll help them create their individual ATRN community and then twice a year, all the smaller ATRN communities will meet to learn from each other.

We think this format will offer three things to the educators within our school district. First, it may encourage the many new teachers to become part of a professional reflection community. Second, it may aid the formation of inquiry groups within individual schools centered around specific goals. And third, it may offer support to those teachers who want to continue to grow professionally but are unsure of how to proceed.

We're excited about the potential of developing smaller teacher research communities, as well as the benefit to ourselves as we continue to grow as reflective educators.

Finally, I have the opportunity to apply my understanding about communities to a much wider group of people than I ever envisioned. As I assumed the position of chair of S-Step this past spring, I have the chance to expand my understanding about strengthening a community that is sprinkled over the world and gathers together once a year. I look forward to the challenge and am excited about the possibilities.

The logs are now glowing coals, our cups are empty, and it's time to pull on boots and head for home. It is impossible to determine where these all these communities will lead me in new understandings, but based on past experience, I can't expect anything less than a continuation of a grand adventure. I wish the same for you. Before we leave, there is one last thought I'd like to share from one of my favorite writers, Barry Lopez (1986):

> I thought about the great desire among friends and colleagues and travelers who meet on the road, to share what they know, what they have seen and imagined. Not to have a shared understanding, but to share what one has come to understand.
>
> In such an atmosphere of mutual regard, in which each can roll out his or her maps with no fear of contradiction, of suspicion or theft, it is possible to imagine the long, graceful strides of human history. (p. 270)

It is with this wish that I present my thesis.

CHAPTER 9
CONTINUING COMMUNITY: A LOOK FORWARD
EXTENDING UNDERSTANDING

Note to the Reader

In this final chapter, I place my ideas developed in this thesis in relationship to current thinking within the educational field. Using the term *bricoleur*, I identify current educators, who as Denzin and Lincoln describe, are poised at the bridge and have a vision of the possibilities (2000). In each of the three sections, I briefly describe their ideas, identify a central issue, and end with how I've crossed their bridge and gone beyond their thinking.

I believe this final chapter shows two essential elements. First, as I examine the ideas of these current researchers, I am able to show how my research has in some way moved their ideas forward. Second, I demonstrate how I am still evolving in my thinking about communities. Even as I write this ending chapter, I am examining and clarifying a new understanding about this topic.

Reader, I do have to tell you that this chapter was the very hardest to write. It took me more than a year to muddle through. The problem was the issue of critique. I am very concerned about this stance in our profession. For me, it holds the implication of discounting another person's ideas for the betterment of my own. I just could not bring myself to enter into that type of dialogue with fellow educators based on my belief about community. I spent more than a year searching for a way in which I could interact with the ideas of others and still maintain my values.

Even as I write this, I realize I saved this issue for the last section of my thesis in order for you and I to build a mutual community. Nell Noddings (1994) observes that when the person showing care sees the response in the one shown the caring, the relationship is complete. As we reach the end of my thesis, I get a sense that our relationship is complete. I also know your presence throughout this thesis has given me confidence in completing this final chapter as I work to demonstrate caring interaction with others. It's only after you've accompanied me throughout my journey that I can mindfully and care-fully examine the work of others. I separate the word care-fully to highlight the importance of the element of care, for the following interaction is thought about with care, written with care, and shared with care.

The most personally significant joy I've gained from this entire thesis process, including the researching, reading, writing, sharing, and all the learning, has been in

my ability to construct ways that allow me to be consistent with my values. This thesis represents a huge internal struggle and tension in knowing what I had to do for the academic world and what I needed to do based on my values. Thank you for being my partner along the way.

There are two defining characteristics of a "true" Alaskan. One is the ability to solve a problem by making do with the items at hand. The second one is learning to do what is necessary to keep going. Early pioneers learned ways to efficiently haul water from nearby frozen streams, using everything from sled dogs to handmade birch buckets. As more recent Alaskan pioneers, Ken and I learned bus mechanics and learned to build (and rebuild) a house. We carved out a place for our family by learning to be creative in a rugged environment. We learned from the past experiences of others and created our own ways to make it through.

I believe a creative make-do attitude is also necessary for teacher and action researchers in the present complex educational climate (Fullan, 1999; Barker, 1996; Throne, 1994). Denzin and Lincoln (1994) use the term *"bricoleur"* (which could also describe the ultimate Alaskan pioneer) to refer to a make-do type of researcher. They define *bricoleur* as one who uses tools to fit the task, who juggles a number of research tasks, who has a foundational understanding of various positions within the field, who has an awareness of the political implications of research, who values individual experience, and who understands the implications of the personal aspects to research. They conclude that qualitative researchers, through the invention of their methods and the art of the representation, become innovators and pioneers. Based on Denzin and Lincoln's definition of *bricoleur*, I've identified three groups of qualitative researchers who I believe are *bricoleurs*. I invite you to join me as together we visit these creative educators through their ideas.

Let's begin with a look at a current piece of writing from Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Susan Lytle. I start here because I first heard about teacher research from Cochran-Smith, and as a neophyte teacher researcher, I listened in awe as she shared ways I could improve my practice. I continue to admire the way she thinks and her ability to put her thoughts in writing. Cochran-Smith and Lytle always offer me much to consider, and the chapter in their book titled "Relationships of Knowledge and Practice: Teacher Learning in Communities" is no exception.

The next group includes Pam Lomax, Jack Whitehead, Zoe Parker, and Moyra Evans. Working on various aspects of action research over the years, these educators offer another perspective within the field of education. At the 1999 AERA conference, in the BERA symposium presentation entitled "Creating Educative Community Through Educational Research", they propose a new discipline of education.

The final group we will explore together is an American Educational Research special interest group. In its seventh year, the Self Study of Teacher Education Practices (S-Step) is creating a place for itself in the field of education. Ken Zeichner, in his 1998 AERA Division K vice-presidential address, noted the significance of this work to the field of education. We'll look at several works by S-Step members.

Bricoleurs: Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Susan Lytle, "Relationships of Knowledge and Practice: Teacher Learning in Communities"

In a contributing chapter to the 1999 *Review of Research in Education,* Cochran-Smith and Lytle identify three different views of teacher learning, the embedded assumptions, and the implications of each view. The first is "knowledge for practice", which is based on the "idea that knowing more leads more or less directly to more effective practice" (254). The second is "knowledge in practice". In this view, the emphasis is on the construction of understanding is done while in the act of teaching. The third and final view, "knowledge of practice", focuses on the connection of knowing to the learner. Here probing questions guide the educator in formulating perceptions about teaching.

As *bricoleurs*, Cochran-Smith and Lytle are offering another way to think about teacher learning. While there is much I like about their work as it is presented in this chapter, I'd like to share with you three of my concerns. We'll begin with the issue of power, then move to the three teacher learning relationships, then end with what I call "going beyond", or stepping outside the presented view.

Power

In the weeks after I read their chapter, I found myself mentally categorizing the work of other educators in Cochran-Smith and Lytle's three categories. I found this both helpful and unsettling. It's helpful because I have another lens through which to view educational writing. It's unsettling because I found I so easily slipped into their way of thinking and because, as I stand back from their work, I realize it limits my way of thinking. Let me explain.

As I stated before, I admire the work of Cochran-Smith and Lytle. They are articulate and well respected, and because of those two characteristics the issue of power arises. In their book *Inside/Outside,* they seemed to take a tentative view of the possibilities and the future of teacher research by using such words as might, some,

may, possible, potential. I wanted an all-out thumbs-up attitude regarding teacher research, described in definite terms such as does, can, and is, because I felt that I (and ATRN) was doing everything that Cochran-Smith and Lytle thought teacher research "might" achieve. I believe they are strong advocates for teacher research, but their work often leaves me uneasy.

The chapter "The Relationship of Knowledge and Practice: Teacher Learning in Communities" creates this same feeling for me. While the three views offer ways in which to examine teacher learning, I believe they also limit thinking. Because these two researchers are so well known, I wonder how much other educators question their pronouncements? I'm thinking specifically about teacher researchers in the public school classroom. Will they take this piece of writing as an absolute truth because it comes from two well-recognized educators who are known to support teacher research? I wonder if Cochran-Smith and Lytle thought about this as they constructed this chapter?

The style in which the chapter is written contributes to the "all knowing" aspect. It is a matter-of-fact type of writing with very few self inquiries, reflective possibilities, or personal aspects. The authors don't share with us, the readers, their journey to their way of thinking. I don't get a sense of them in their writing. Since their intention seems to be to encourage teacher communities, I would expect their writing to somehow reflect this purpose.

In my thesis, I struggled with a way in which I could live out my value of community through my writing. I believe I achieved this goal by sharing personal stories, by carefully choosing welcoming and inviting words, and by consistently addressing you, the reader. I worked to draw you into my work by creating a personal conversation with you, generating a link with you as an individual person rather than addressing an unknown audience. I believe Lytle and Cochran-Smith's writing about community would be enhanced if they considered their written words as a way to establish and model relationships rather than as a vehicle for dispensing information.

I feel their writing says a great deal about the issue of power. I saw you as a fellow researcher and companion as I shared my personal and professional conflicts, successes, and discoveries. I wanted you to be with me in the moment to understand the development of my thoughts. Because Cochran-Smith and Lytle's writing is neat and tidy with no doubts or struggles, and it appears to be all-knowing, they eliminate me from this relationship with them. It leaves little room for a mutual conversation, thus fostering a sense of power on the part of the authors.

The other issue concerning power is voice. There is no teacher voice in this chapter. They support their views with people who write about teacher researchers, rather than those who do teacher research. I see this as a very subtle way of continuing the established power positions. Because of their position in the educational world, the authors are modeling accepted ways to talk about teacher research. In this article, they are strengthening the view that those positioned in the unviersity arena who write accounts of teacher researchers are more knowledgable than practicing teacher researchers.

As I write the paragraph above, I am thinking about my own thesis. What did I do? I did quote students and fellow teacher researchers, but I must admit, I felt an overwhelming pressure to include those "known" educators in my research. I realized early in this process that my work would not be considered a serious piece of research if I didn't have a full roster in my bibliography. Other educators did influence my thinking and helped me along in my research, by either confirming or extending my ideas, but I perceived, whether real or not, that I needed everything supported by an "expert".

In my struggle to maintain my own voice and my own sense of being an expert, I kept the body of my research relatively free of citations and placed them in the beginning and ending chapters. Again, I tried to model a way to walk in two worlds. Could I, through this thesis, show a way to share my research that would maintain my own voice of authority and still satisfy the world of academe? I believe I have, but it's been extremely hard, I hope this thesis will be helpful for future teacher researchers who struggle with the same issue.

Three Teacher Learning Relationships

Cochran-Smith and Lytle offer us three ways to classify "conceptions of teacher learning" (249). Conception 1, Knowledge For Practice, is based on the belief that knowing more leads to better practice. Conception 2, Knowledge In Practice, emphasizes the view in which educators gain knowledge through experience and reflection on that experience. The final conception is Knowledge Of Practice. Here discussions, both internal and external, lead to better teaching and knowledge about teaching. They summarize the main ideas of each and illustrate how each looks in particular contexts. As I mentioned in the beginning, I did find myself mentally categorizing educators into these three groupings when I attended the last AERA meeting. It was a handy way of labeling ideas.

But my actions concern me for several reasons. The first is the implications of an implied total number of categories. It reminds me of Howard Gardner's seven intelligences (1983) where I accepted the author's divisions as the end of the conversation. It wasn't until Gardner wrote about another category that I realized there wasn't a finite number. Similarly when I read Cochran-Smith and Lytle's chapter, I was swept into their clearly defined divisions. Then as I reflected upon my teaching life, I saw myself sometimes in all three individual categories, sometimes in a type of blended conception, and sometimes outside these classifications altogether. I think the three categories can provide a place to begin the conversation regarding the different conceptions of teacher learning, but embedded in the power issues I discussed, these classifications give the appearance of being concrete and definite.

I tried to illustrate a different way of sharing knowledge in my thesis. By showing the evolution of my values as they emerged through my practice, I wished to demonstrate the living aspect to my perceptions, ideas, and practice. I also view this thesis as a thriving document, not a static declaration of an idea but a place to share my understanding at this particular moment and to begin the conversation with you about the topic of community, personal values, and representation. And unlike Cochran-Smith and Lytle's written work, I hope the issue of power is not a barrier to discussion.

Going Beyond

"Going beyond" is a term used in my classroom to describe an action by a student who takes an idea and then somehow extends their knowledge to transform their personal understanding and learning in some fashion. Lytle and Cochran-Smith's chapter provides a framework that gives me an opportunity to closely reexamine my contributions to our educational community to see if I've gone beyond in my thinking.

The most significant issue is the one of power. I believe I have moved beyond this issue through my three original contributions of (1) defining, expressing and communicating my values; (2) creating and facilitating four communities; and (3) representing my work. All of these three are woven together to model an alternative to the power issues embedded within Lytle and Cochran-Smith's work.

In attempting to live out my values of caring, compassion, respect, and integrity through the written word, I worked to shape a living document that illustrates one way of creating community within a written context. I share my journey toward

understanding how to build and facilitate four very different communities. Also in this thesis, I've opened myself to you as I describe the process of recognizing and articulating my own living theory. My issue is one of community: building a community of understanding with you, the reader. It is important to me that you and I have a warm, receptive relationship in which we can begin to discuss this study, its implications, and its possibilities. I believe I have attained those goals in this work.

Bricoleurs: Moyra Evans, Pam Lomax, Zoe Parker, and Jack Whitehead, "Creating Educative Community Through Educational Research"

In this collection of papers, these four researchers propose a new discipline of education. Together, Whitehead's theories of "I" as a living contradiction, creating personal living educational theories, and the question of "How do I improve my practice" (Whitehead, 1993); Lomax's views of learning through a dialectical process involving the self and others (Lomax, 1999); Parker's example of finding a path to a clearer understanding of herself (Parker, 1999); and Evans' account of the implications of action research within her school (Evans, 1999) assemble a picture of a "new discipline of educational enquiry" (Whitehead, 1999, p. 1).

As with Cochran-Smith and Lytle, these four British researchers are colleagues whom I admire, and all four have influenced my thinking. As innovative *bricoleurs*, Evans, Lomax, Parker, and Whitehead are offering an original way of thinking about education as well as living out their intentions. Using my work shared in this thesis, I'd like to examine their idea in three ways, first from examination of their proposed new discipline, second through the issue of risk, and finally by showing my way of going beyond.

The New Discipline

As I read the work shared in the four papers, I had two goals in mind. First, I wanted to gain a clear understanding of their idea of "new discipline", and second, I was eager to see if and how my research in this thesis corresponded to their design. In studying their text, I identified four broad characteristics of their proposed new discipline: political implications, action research, inter-subjective dialectic, and intra-subjective dialectic.

Political Implications

The political characteristic appears to be divided into two parts: those forces outside of school and those forces within the school itself. Many of the outside forces are the common ones that a great number of teachers and school districts are currently facing, such as public demands, money issues, and educational reform. Within the school itself, Evans' study illustrates the direct implication of the issues of time and the influence of colleagues upon the structure of the school.

As a classroom teacher, I, too, felt the implications of those outside and inside forces. But it took me a long time to recognize the political aspect in my professional life, because as Patrick Shannon (1992) points out,

> They [teachers] consider themselves apolitical in their work—lamenting the politics they do recognize in the system, defining their role as delivering already determined content in traditional ways, and abdicating their rightful place in the decision making that influences their students' and their lives in and out of school. . . . All teachers are political, whether they are conscious of it or not. Their acts contribute to or challenge the status quo. (p. 2)

As a beginning teacher, I didn't think challenging the system was political, but was something I did for the benefit of my students. I didn't view pushing the boundaries in my teaching as a political act. At that time in my teaching, to me being political meant holding an office in the local teacher union.

In looking back at my growth as an educator and at my research shared with you in this thesis, I now understand that everything I did was in some way political. Closing my door and working to create a close-knit student community was a political statement reflecting my view of education. Every community I fostered was in some fashion a political act. Leaving Richardson Elementary was an extremely political move. Now, with the creation of Chinook Charter School, I'm in the middle of my most political stance of all. Everything associated with that school challenges the traditional educational system. Without being consistently interactive and lobbying with the local school board, the school district, and all the state legislators, Chinook would not exist. Attempting to create positive relationships and developing communities with all those entities requires me to draw on every bit of understanding

I've gained in the past ten years. Everything I've done in this thesis has prepared me for this moment.

Action Research

All the authors directly discuss the element of action research, self study, or self inquiry as a foundational guide for their inquiry. The four papers show the result of the authors' collaborative efforts over time to examine their work and the context in which they work. Lomax, Parker, Evans, and Whitehead use the components of questioning self, questioning others, and questioning practice to gain insights into their study.

I believe it's quite evident that my research as shared with you here is based on an action research approach. This study was initiated by questioning my observations within the classroom and then examining my own actions. It seemed a natural step to begin to ask myself questions about my intentions. This shift developed into the quest for identification of my personal values. Questions from others helped me clarify my thinking, pushed me into examining issues from a different point of view, and pointed me to other educators' ideas.

Inter-Subjective Dialectic

Pam Lomax defines inter-subjective dialectic as that "which occurs when we share our representation of our idea with others and their affirming or questioning response to our communicated meaning challenges us to see something else (1999, p. 5). In examining the work shared in the four written papers, I arrived at three types of actions that allow the inter-subjective dialectic to occur: isolation, critical community involvement, and constrained disagreement. Let's look at each of the three elements, one at a time.

First is the issue of isolation. Donmoyer (1996) uses the term "Balkanization" to describe the self-contained isolated scholarly groups within the educational field, and Lomax and Whitehead specifically call for collaborative action across the disciplines. I examined this issue in all the papers in terms of "living theory" (Whitehead, 1993). Were these four educators living out the theory of a new discipline by pulling ideas from other disciplines and writing in such a way that invited others into their thinking?

I searched for inclusion of ideas from those outside the action research field. I found that the papers did include some references, which ranged from adult education

to literature, but they didn't step very far across the traditional lines of research boundaries. I expected them to extensively model this idea since one of the basic tenets of the proposed new disciplines is to open communication with other disciplines. Examining the ways of inviting others into their work was more difficult to discern. Whitehead poses frequent questions to the reader and Parker pulls you into her life by sharing herself, while Evans and Lomax give a rather straightforward account of their thinking.

In thinking about my research, I did include ideas from various fields outside of education. As reviewed in Chapter 2, I gained knowledge from the fields of business, sociology, and linguistics, and I especially looked to business for information on developing teams and corporate organizations. One of my goals of this thesis was to structure the representation of my research to bring you into my work by talking directly to you, the reader, sharing personal stories, and making my thinking process visible.

The second element of inter-subjective dialectic is the involvement in a critical community. The authors not only discuss the importance of verbally sharing their work, but their papers show the development of their thinking gained through feedback from each other.

This is a very interesting element to personally consider. In my research I believe I was successful in creating and facilitating communities, but in the writing of this thesis I was not satisfied with my actions. I was definitely a "living contradiction" (Whitehead, 1993). At the beginning of this process and during the winter, I used ATRN as my collaborative community. The summers I was in Bath, I participated in the Monday seminar group. Over time, however, I was not able to sustain consistent relationships with both groups. ATRN was in transition, I started a school, I couldn't keep up with the e-mail messages from Bath, and I was teaching at the university. The list was endless. I felt tremendous guilt in not being the "ideal" member of both communities.

As I write this, I realize, as I did with my parent community, that a community doesn't have to be a "group" of people. Also, I understand now that as my needs changed in terms of writing this thesis, my support community also changed. A few remained consistent, but I also obtained feedback from two friends concerning the review of literature section. Another colleague reviewed the Richardson Elementary chapter. Five of my research peers worked with me on my

last two chapters. My recent communities are now more fluid and flexible than in the past (Shaffer & Anundsen, 1993).

I am not the same person who began this study. At the start, I saw community as a stable group of peers who supported everyone's efforts. I learned from my research that a community can move away from my original view and be any number of people coming together for a varied length of time. As I continue to read about the issue of community, one idea occurs over and over. The communities of the future will be varied in all aspects. People will come together in different ways for different reasons and for different periods of time (Hesselbein, Goldsmith, Beckhard, & Schubert, 1998; Peck, 1987; Schubert, 1998; Senge, et al., 1994; Shaffer & Anundsen, 1993).

I find it interesting that I gained this understanding when I worked with my parents but didn't carry it any further and apply it to myself. I've only now admitted to myself the validity of those communities and given myself permission to be a part of them. I continue to gain new understandings of community.

Constrained disagreement is the final element. I am concerned about the use of this term. Lomax notes, "Constrained disagreement implies both critique and collaboration" (1999). Evans' (1999) paper best illustrates this as she describes her work with the teachers at the Denbigh School. While I do agree that critique and collaboration can coexist, I've learned that criticism needed be framed in a heartfelt caring manner and guided by affection and regard for the other (Noddings, 1984). This is not an artificial politeness, but a genuine compassion for the soul of the individual.

I discovered with my sixth graders that so much more was accomplished when concerns were framed in forms of questions, such as "Would you please tell us more about . . . ?" or "What are you thinking here ? I transferred the same approach to ATRN as we began discussing our research. Our conversions about our research usually began with "Have you thought about . . . ?" I've found when said in gentle manner with concern for the other, the one questioned is more receptive to new thinking. This format also provides a model for individuals to start to initiate self questioning, which is a part of the intra subjective dialectic.

Intra-Subjective Dialectic

The final part of the new discipline is the intra-subjective dialectic. This is the inward or personal look at our work. I found three parts to this conversation with the

self. (1) The first is the recognition of "I" as a living contradiction (Whitehead, 1993). This understanding occurs through self questioning that develops from ongoing relationships over a period of time. Within this process, personal values emerge. Evans and Parker use self questioning to create shifts in thinking and ultimately in their actions. (2) The second action of the intra-subjective dialectic is the ability to self question. Evans and Parker used their self questioning to create shifts in thinking and ultimately in their actions. Parker refers to paying attention to the "inside, little, and particular" to help her examine her life as a learner (1999, p. 1). (3) A third action includes the identification of personal values. Throughout their texts, Evans, Whitehead, and Parker show how they live out their values as they explore their research questions.

In this aspect my research is closely aligned to the ideas of these authors. I, too, found it necessary to identify my values in order to clarify my understanding about teaching and my actions in my personal life. This realization came through conversations with others and self questioning as this thesis shows. As one of my original contributions to educational knowledge, I attempt to show how I identify my values. I endeavor to open up the process in order for you to live it with me.

Risk

I'd like to take a brief look at the issue of risk within this collection of writings. In one way, this group of researchers takes a great risk in calling for an entirely new discipline of education at an international conference. That is a professional risk. On the other hand, I didn't see consistent personal risk. Parker takes the biggest leap when she shares her personal story. The other three are risk-free except for the two times Whitehead alludes to tensions between the four authors. He notes that the sharing of individual work was not a totally positive experience and the discussions elicited strain. It is interesting to note this is not mentioned by any of the other three.

This discrepancy made me think about my research shared here. Have I been honest with you through this writing? I struggled with whether to include the incident of leaving Richardson Elementary. I agonized over the description of the staff at Richardson, not knowing what their reaction would be if they read this part of my narrative. My continual self-questioning involves the tug and pull between honesty for the true aspect to the research (which might help others in their own thinking) or

glossing over the tensions to protect the already tentative relationship. How do I as a researcher decide?

In these four papers, three of the researchers either decided to ignore the issue or felt it wasn't relevant to the topic. One chose to offer it to the reader, and Whitehead does acknowledge they have addressed this issue in another paper (Lomax, Evans, Parker, & Whitehead, 1999). I decided to include the tensions in my work.

I think it's important to tell a full story of our work. Other communities of researchers could benefit from understanding how these tensions arose and affected the work as presented in the symposium. In this case, I feel a brief account would help the reader to understand the personal aspects of the four authors. By remaining silent, these authors give a misleading impression concerning the inner workings and dynamics of this particular community.

Going Beyond

My going beyond is my ability to use the knowledge gained through my research in a useful and meaningful way. By being able to distill, crystallize, and focus my understandings, I have the means to mindfully and thoughtfully analyze the work of others. Together, let's look at the ideas of these four educators through the lens of my research regarding community.

The title of the symposium, presented at the American Educational Research Association, was "Creating Educative Community through Educational Research", so let's examine the four papers to see if, when read as a collection, they demonstrate elements of a community. Using my own research work shared with you in this thesis, I believe there to be four common characteristics of supportive communities. (1) The individuals involved in a community usually have a common goal, either in belief or in action. (2) There is a dynamic structure to the group. Palmer (1993) describes this as "a network of relationships between individual persons" (122). Yet it's more than the relationships. Through these interactions of the members, the community develops a personality of its own. (3) Individual change happens from the interactions of others within the community. (4) A reflective stance usually occurs. The community often becomes a place where members have the freedom and the support to turn inward to examine their own values of who they are and what they can do (Peterson, 1992).

Common Goal

In examining the issue of a common goal, I asked myself if these papers demonstrated two things. Did they show heart—a reason for being together (Wheatley & Kellner-Rogers, 1998)—and did they have the means to achieve this goal? I identified their community goal as a desire to change by noting the reoccurring theme of improving their own practice. Parker begins her paper by explaining the importance of examining the "little and particular" as she learns to "be a professional educator; to be a researcher and learner; and to be a better person" (1). Lomax approaches the same theme in a more analytical way: "My view of action research requires action towards improvement; making one's own practice the focus" (4). Elements like this were woven throughout each of the papers.

I also believe they are using self study/action research to move themselves toward that goal since the foundations of the four papers rely on this method of reflective inquiry. Evans' comment is representative of all the papers in terms of the tone toward action research and evidence of self study: "The question 'how can I improve my . . . ?' takes the researcher into the area of self study because the nature of the question is asking how can I change some part of me; the question turns the action researcher into a learner about himself or herself, as well as about improving the education of children" (3).

Dynamic Structure

By especially reflecting upon my work with the Richardson community, I believe there are three aspects to the dynamic structure of a community: the interactive relationships, the dialectic, and the individual roles. I believe these elements are critical aspects to a healthy, growing community.

In examining interactive relationships, I looked for mutual exchanges between the members. After a few meetings with the Wednesday class at Richardson Elementary, I realized the importance of individuals being able to share with all participants, not just their long-time friends. I looked at the four pieces of writing for some evidence of equal sharing. Within all the papers I found reference to critical friendships and the importance of sharing individual work with the other members. Everyone was mentioned in some fashion in each of the texts.

The second aspect is the dialectic. The discussions among the Richardson community were sometimes heartfelt and sometimes skated the surface. There were a few instances of tension, and most were openly resolved. We also had golden moments when all were deeply engaged in the topic and I sensed we all benefited

when this occurred (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). Within these four papers, Lomax, Parker, and Evans refer to discussions within this particular community as a way to gain insight and as part of the validation process. Whitehead, while also referring to the helpfulness of the others, mentions some tension in the exchanges. None of the other three allude to this.

The final important element is the role each participant plays. In the Richardson class, I struggled to be a participant and a part of the community. The student teachers saw themselves as learners and used the opportunity to ask questions and listen to experienced educators. A few participants saw themselves as discussion leaders. In examining these papers, I wanted to see how each author positioned her/himself within the community. Were there overlapping roles? Was there a sense of struggle for specific roles? Each assumed a different role, in addition to the role of self-examiner and learner. Whitehead plays the global, all-encompassing position with his references to world politics and economics. Lomax provides the foundational layer. Her theoretical knowledge points the direction and the others follow. Through her intensely self-reflective position, Parker offers the internal view. In sharing her very singular experiences, she opens the way for others to share the personal as well. Finally, Evans' role is of the practical. She demonstrates a way in which one person can bring about change within an institutional setting.

Granted, because these are written papers presented at a very visible and public conference, I assume they agreed upon the approach each paper would take. But I also assume they chose individual stances based on past experiences and identified strengths within the community.

Change

In thinking about change, I looked to my work with my sixth graders. The children showed me that change happens over time within a particular context and that it's a meaningful step in their acceptance of the importance of community for the child to see him/herself as a significant member of the wider class organization. Within these four papers, Parker and Evans dealt most directly with change over time. Both are personal accounts of self examination in relationship to the events around them. Lomax's and Whitehead's work, however, are more indirect on this issue. They both mention they have changed but are not explicit as to exactly how or when this took place.

I also learned from my sixth graders that when a student could share personal elements, they felt they belonged and were a member of the classroom community. So I looked for confidence and the element of self within the texts of these four authors. Whitehead shows both these characteristics when he notes, "In order to retain my sense of the integrity of my discipline as an educator, I need to break with the traditional conventions on how to engage academically with ideas of other researchers" (14). Parker's and Evans' papers also explicitly document their growing certainty through the account of their work. There is no lack of confidence within this group.

Reflective Stance

The final aspect of community is the reflective stance of the members. Using the ATRN community as a model, I looked for two features, the development of trust and the examination of the self. The examination of the self is a necessary ingredient in a self study (Barnes, 1998) and is illustrated in all the papers. Each author offers a personal account of their beliefs based on their individual research.

In working with the ATRN group, I learned the importance of helping trust develop among the members. Without it, the researchers were unwilling to share their research, and since many of the projects involved personal change, trust was essential. It was hard to determine the level the trust between the four researchers based solely on their written work. In my experience with ATRN, evidence of or lack of trust shines through interactive conversations. Not being privy to those exchanges, I looked for references to each other that in some way changed thinking. Whitehead's work clearly demonstrates this element: "I think it is important to fully acknowledge the way in which the creative and productive lives of other educators and researchers have helped to form my own. I could not have articulated my beliefs above without the contributions of others" (3). Lomax, Parker, and Evans also refer to each other in a similar fashion. I believe the ultimate trust in the community is being able to work together to publicly share their inquiries. Like ATRN's yearly publication of research, these four authors chose to open their work and ideas to other educators.

But something is missing. As I mentioned before, the title of this symposium was "Creating Educative Community Through Educational Research". The four authors do show elements of being a community, but they don't show how they themselves reached that point or offer ways for others to attempt to achieve a similar structure. The story of their journey would be helpful for other groups of researchers

wishing to develop a similar type of cooperative group. I believe my research fills in this missing piece.

Bricoleaurs: Mary Lynn Hamilton and Stefinee Pinnegar, "The Value and the Promise of Self-Study"

Mary Lynn Hamilton and Stefinee Pinnegar (1998) begin this chapter with the words, "At the heart of the work found within this text lies the impassioned desires . . ." (235). I note this because of the use of the words "heart" and "impassioned". I believe it describes self-study. Others use words such as honesty, moral ethos, integrity, personal, beliefs, and relationships in an attempt to capture the spirit and essence of self-study (LaBoskey, 1998; Loughran, 1998; Russell, 1998). These are feeling words, words that describe a different type of inquiry from the traditional educational research. Emphasizing the inter-dialectic and the intra-dialectic of the new discipline described by the four previous educators, self-study researchers look closely at their own practice in order to examine their actions in relationship to their values (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 1998). It can be an individual type of study supported by like-minded colleagues, a collaborative study of two or more educators examining an issue, or a collaborative type of study where the collaboration is the study. In any situation, inherent within self-study is the importance of supportive colleagues (Barnes, 1998).

The Issue of Living

As Cochran-Smith and Lytle's issue is power, Lomax's, Parker's, Evans', and Whitehead's issue concerns risk, I believe S-Step's issue is living. It's the living out of ideas, showing what self-study really looks like in action, and demonstrating the personal along with the professional. As an observer at the first Castle Conference, sponsored by S-Step, Douglas Barnes used the words caring and humane to describe the S-Step community's approach to learning and research. Self-study is a way to intimately link professional concerns, personal values, and learning.

Through self examination of contradictions, members of S-Step demonstrate the importance of meshing the personal with the professional. Tom Russell (1998) said that we in S-Step are captivated by our living contradictions, and I believe that's true. In my study, those instances in my professional and personal life that created dissonance were the ones I continued to ponder and consider. The noncooperative writing groups, my internal need to work within a cohesive classroom community,

my unease with the parent-teacher relationship, and my professional loneliness were the beginning points leading to change. Ultimately through a process of teacher/action research I arrived at new understandings in building and facilitating communities and a new awareness of myself.

Going Beyond

I'd like to share with you two ideas that have been identified as important to the field of education. Ann Lieberman and Lynne Miller (2000), in examining the promising trends within our profession, highlight the significance of creating teacher communities. In addition, Alan Schoenfeld, in his presidential address at the 1999 AERA annual meeting, discusses the importance of theory and practice as a dual action. All three educators offer a glimpse of the possible.

Lieberman and Miller (2000), in examining promising educational trends for this next century, note the positive research on "teacher's growth and development when they work together in communities teaching each other, learning together, and focusing on the successes and challenges of educating their students" (58). Cochran-Smith and Lytle also call for supportive inquiry communities for educators, and the concept of community is within the new discipline as outlined by Whitehead and Lomax. None, however, show how the community is to be formulated or discuss ways in which it can be supported for continual growth.

My work, as presented in this thesis, shows how this can be done. I illustrate various ways in which communities can be created and nurtured. My work with my students shows how I used teacher/action research to understand the happenings within the classroom. Using the knowledge gained from my observations, self-questioning, and readings, I tried new actions. It was in this repetitive cycle that I created new knowledge about communities. Through my work with the parents, my building colleagues, and other teacher researchers, I had the opportunity to see how my new knowledge worked in three other situations and settings. I not only gained new insights, but in sharing my results with you, I offer you an example of how communities can be facilitated.

Community formats are being suggested as ways to further the educational development of teachers, as demonstrated by the three groups of *bricoleurs* mentioned above. In this thesis, I'm showing possible ways in which communities can be created, nurtured, and strengthened.

Alan Schoenfeld (1999) also looks into the future of the educational field and identifies challenges for the next century. One of the areas he identifies where he believes theoretical ideas can be advanced is the issue of melding practice and theory, each informing the other in order to gain new understandings about teaching.

> The study of teaching offers wonderful opportunities for both fundamental and applied research. Teaching is a knowledge-based activity; it is highly interactive and contingent on dynamically changing circumstances; and it calls for rapid decision making in the service of multiple and changing goals. On the theoretical side of the coin, to be able to describe and provide detailed theoretical models of such activity, explaining how and why teachers do what they do amidst the complexity of the classroom, is to make significant strides in understanding human thought and action. This hardly tells the whole story—for example, a theory of teaching-in-context does not address the major theoretical issue of how teachers *learn* from their teaching—but it sets the stage for such work. (1999, p. 13)

I totally agree with Schoenfeld's initial thoughts. I believe teaching is a very interactive endeavor based on the happenings of the moment. I also agree that I, as an educator, must make instantaneous decisions, all varied and all based on the ebb and flow of the actions and inquiries of my students and myself. But I believe my work, as shared with you here, addresses his uncertainties in the quote above. As a reflective educator, I have clearly explained my actions and my thinking. I have opened my thinking to you so that you can see the basis for my actions. I also share my process in identifying values and not only show how that process has become a meaningful step in my growth as an educator, but also how those values form the basis from which I judge myself. And to demonstrate the strength of my beliefs, I live out my values through the representation of my work. I have gone beyond setting the stage; I am showing you what can be done.

I began these final thoughts by listing Denzin and Lincoln's attributes of a *bricoleur* (uses tools to fit the task, juggles a number of tasks, has an understanding of the field, has an awareness of the political aspect, values personal experience, and

understands the personal aspect). While I agree with this description, I would like to add what I believe are three additional essential characteristics of a *bricoleur.*

What appeals to me in using *bricoleur* as a defining term is the inherent idea of invention. While Denzin and Lincoln don't emphasize this aspect, I believe it's the underlying characteristic defining a teacher/action researcher in the current unsettled educational field. For me, it's the most exciting part of inquiry. This thesis is an example of invention: not a haphazard accidental happening but an intentional and purposeful invention. Through observation, thoughtful questioning, and then playing with possibilities of my invention or kernels of ideas from others, I did create an inclusive community with my classroom. The communities with parents, teaching peers, and research colleagues resulted from my experimentation.

The representation of my research is also a result of my personal invention. I worked to find a way to live out my values through the written text of this thesis, and I believe I have succeeded.

The other appealing aspect of the term *bricoleur* concerns a sense of the dynamic. Qualitative research is not static. Movement begins for me at those split-second moments of Schon's reflection-in-action (1995). As a reflective teacher researcher, I examine and reexamine those surprise moments and push myself deeper and deeper into my study through self inquiry. This study grew to encompass more and more communities because I continually asked myself, "What happened here?", "What did I do", "How did the other respond?", and "What if . . .".

Those questions not only led to a deeper understanding of the issue of community but also led to the process of identifying my values. With one focus on community and another focus on my emerging values, then realizing how they are intertwined, I began to truly see myself as a creator of my own living educational theory.

I believe another aspect of being a *bricoleur* is the involvement within a community. Denzin and Lincoln include interactiveness as a *bricoleur* characteristic, but they look at it from the internal and personal aspects a researcher brings to the study. I suggest extending their view of interaction of the *bricoleur* to include the external supportive research community, as the three groups I discussed here suggest. But I'm also considering the possibility of the reflective self as a community unto itself. Through my work with the parents, I changed my views concerning community. I realized the quality of relations was the important factor, not the number of participants. By examining myself to fully understand my values and actions, I

believe I am creating a community of one based on a caring relationship of self-knowing. Olssen (2000) expresses a concern about neglecting the self in favor of knowledge of the self, but in my community of one, my selves are supportive. In working to understand, I'm living my values of care and respect to myself as I enact upon my beliefs concerning personal knowledge.

I believe that I am participating in a type of dynamic interaction in an internal dimension as I mentally consider the voices of other researchers, the stories of colleagues, the lived experiences of my past practices, the awareness of my beliefs, and the routine self questioning. This is my connected knowing of myself (Clinchy, 1996) and my community of one.

I feel my research demonstrates the can-do spirit as identified by Denzin and Lincoln. So I add my name to the *bricoleur* list based on my process of defining, expressing, and communicating my values; the examination and analysis of my professional learning as a teacher researcher as I create and facilitate four communities; and the representation of my research as I attempt to live out my values through this written text. These are my original contributions to my chosen profession.

EPILOGUE

I'd like you to accompany me on one more journey, to a place I continue to explore and find new views. In this last section of my thesis, I'd like you to come with me so we can share some further thoughts. As I end the body of my thesis, I realize I need to regard the on-going process of reflection that allows me to understand more clearly not only my thinking but the underlying process of development. In other words, I continue to challenge myself by asking what do I know? How do I know it?

As a result of a sustained conversation with Jack Whitehead, my advisor, I show how I have continue to use the ideas of others to examine my work and to expand my understanding. You will also see how Jack and I worked to reach mutual understanding as we exchanged ideas and explored thoughts together. This ongoing dialogue took place over a ten-day period by the means of computer electronic mail.

Let's begin on September 10. On that particular day, Jack and I were completing the discussion of Chapter 1 and beginning to think about the epilogue. During the day, I receive five messages from Jack with topics ranging from the scholarly contribution of my thesis to addressing the questions "What do we know and how do we know it?" The next day, I receive a note and copy of a paper that Jack and Sarah Fletcher presented at the Conference of the British Educational Research Association in Brighton in 1999, as well as an additional note asking me to think about the concept of self (Harre, 1998). On September 12, I received four more messages, each of which was a densely filled surface, one to three pages in length, offering suggestions and ideas to consider.

The next day, September 13, Jack sent me two more letters, each two pages of single-spaced type. For the first time since before September 10, I replied. I sent three short messages, all very brief. (For ease of reading, all electronic messages will be printed in this font.)

> Good morning, Jack,
>
> It's 9:00 a.m. and I've been at the computer since 7:00 and am now ready for a new cup of tea and new thoughts. I will put the final revisions together for chapter 5 this morning, so now will return to chapter 1 and will respond to your comments . . . .
>
> Love,
>
> Terri

Hi Jack,

. . . Here's what appears to be what I need to do.

1. Relook at my title - it should be more telling of the substance of my thesis.

2. Do the final reading of Chapter 1 and add Chomsky's idea of interest.

3. Read the two articles you are sending as I type this.

4. Construct an appendix in part responding to those two articles. I'll reread Ben's . . .

Off to deal with Chomsky.

Love,

Terri

Hi Jack,

It's late and I'm stopping for the day. After teaching at the U tonight, I ran by school and picked up your Fax. . . .

I'll finish the Interest section in the morning and get it to you. Would you please send all the bibliographic information for Chomsky? I can't find your e-mail with that information. . . .

Talk with you tomorrow.

Terri

What I would like you to notice is that I was not interacting with any of Jack's messages. My notes were short and dealt with tasks to do, but with no response to any of the ideas that Jack was attempting to share. On the morning of September 14, I sent Jack the following:

Hi Jack,

Thanks for the Chomsky information. I know you're right about the writing, but I really do wish I could get at this and get it done.

I need you to do something for me. I know how concerned you are, and I am too. I also know

you are working quite hard in "helping me", but I'm feeling covered with words. When you write to me, you give me at least fifteen things to consider. It's like you're never pausing in the conversation long enough for me to jump in. How about taking a breath and letting me join in?

You know Jack, this thesis will come out like it's supposed to. This isn't a fatalistic attitude, and it doesn't mean I'm not worried or not frantically working on it or not working to meet my expectations of quality. I am doing all those things and more. I probably haven't slept more than four hours each night in the past two weeks from worry and panic.

I know I can't do good work when I'm that anxious, so a part of my concerted effort is to control that panic and work thoughtfully, calmly and steadily. Your words rush at me. I need for you to be calm too.

I'm almost finished with the Interest section and would like you to take a look at it. That is the last part of Chapter 1 and then I can send it off to my editor.

Love,
Terri

It was a difficult note for me to construct because I wanted him to understand that I appreciated his attention, but the amount of his writing was covering me up and not giving me room to think. I revised the note several times, trying to write it in a way that firmly stated my concerns yet would not harm him or our relationship.

This letter was a critical incident for me. I wished to maintain a sense of community with Jack but I also wanted a community that provided a space for my thoughts too. In his next note, Jack promised to remain calm, but he continued to write in his normal style. Seeing this, I forced myself to jump in by making personal accommodations. I retyped his messages in shorter paragraphs so they didn't have the surface appearance of thick text. I separated ideas with various colored pens; I made notes in the margin as to the topic. I purposely worked to find ways that allowed me to more easily enter his ideas and feel on equal footing.

I'm relating this episode so that you, the reader, can not only understand the following dialogue and thinking, but also see that I'm continually working to align my values with my actions. It's an ongoing process that never stops. Over the course of the next seven days, Jack and I continued our community of two and actively discussed the ideas of others, considered our own work, and arrived at new understandings.

Jack and I used the 2001 AERA conference theme "What Do I Know and How Do I Know It" as our center of discussion. All the other issues we explored continually led us back to those two questions. Three supporting themes emerged from our on-line discussions about my research: the aspect of living, the scholarship of inquiry, and the influence on others. As I share these with you, I am drawing them out from the multilayered interchanges so that it will be clearer for you, the reader. I also believe it will allow me to see them in a sharper focus.

The Aspect of Living

Jack initiated this theme of our conversation when he shared "Action Research and Reflective Practice: Towards a Holistic View" by Ruth Leitch and Christopher Day (2000). In conjunction with the Leitch and Day paper, we discussed the elements of emotion and living and linguistic concepts.

Emotion

Jack wrote on September 16:

> I do like the point in Ruth Leitch and Chris Day's paper (p. 187) on Dewey's recognition of the moral base of action in the attitudes of open-mindedness, whole-heartedness and responsibility. I'm hoping you feel these values and my spirit of enquiry in my responses.

In proposing a holistic model of action research, Leitch and Day suggest emotions can be the starting points for change and reflection (2000). After reading their paper, I am startled by the very formal inclusion of emotion and write to Jack:

> Until I read this, it never occurred to me that emotions would not be considered part of reflection and action research. In thinking of my moments that caused me to reconsider my thinking of my actions, I believe they were

> moments of emotion. They were feelings of "something's not right", of discontent in some fashion. This happened most consistently throughout my work with the parent community.
>
> I've learned to trust my emotional thermometer. When I allow myself to intuitively respond to my emotional side, it usually slips into a type of reflection which in turn leads to a new action or idea. I'm thinking of the incident when I changed my afternoon plans to an activity which would allow the student to feel more successful. My empathy and concern for him caused me to do this. Are these values or emotions? I think they are tied together.
>
> Can my values and emotions be separated? Should they separated? Are values based on emotional incidents? Do these need to be identified to truly understand personal values?

An event happened next that allowed me to more fully explore my thoughts about emotions. The day following the note above, I was approached by a parent at my school. In a very aggressive and abusive manner, he shouted horrible accusations at me. This happened right before school started, and I spent the day deeply troubled. That afternoon, he and his wife met with me, and the accusations continued for more than ninety minutes. I was devastated and wrote to Jack a day later:

> This issue took my whole day yesterday and last night I worked at recovering my sense of self. It's been a horrible two days.

Jack responded,

> I feel that I understand when you write "it took my whole day yesterday . . ." I think this is what Ruth [Leitch] and Chris [Day] are focusing on when they stress the importance of emotion.

When I first read Leitch and Day's article I questioned their statement concerning the restrictive boundaries of action based on strong emotions. Initially I wrote Jack that I wasn't sure I agreed with this idea. My feeling at the time was that I often use emotional incidents as opportunities to create positive change. But after my encounter with the parent, I am wondering if that is really true. Did I resort to old behavior patterns? What did I do? I really don't remember much about the day in the classroom, but after coming home and gathering some inner courage, I called each parent of my students. I wanted to know if they shared a similar concern. It was a relief to know that they hadn't even considered the idea. Please join me as I closely examine this incident to more fully understand my thinking and actions.

Sarah Fletcher notes that the self is "a multiple dynamic constantly evolving" (1999). I agree. I believe the motive to closely analyze this incident points out that I want to continue to grow and to understand myself and my practice. And as Fletcher points out, I am a variety of selves.

But what kinds of selves? Harré (1998) organizes a person's perceptions, both public and private, into three parts which at the same time can stand alone and inter-relate. Self 1 represents the self in relation to the world; Self 2 is the person's attributes, which include the genetic factors as well as the influence of environment; and Self 3 is the impression the person makes on others. He locates these as being three separate identities within one person, each with its "characteristic mode of expression" (6).

I remember standing in the hall with the parent. I consciously thought about my body position and uncrossed my arms so I would not present such a defensive stance, but I also backed away, distancing myself. I also tried to show no emotion in my face as he continued to talk, since there were others in the hall and I didn't want them to be alarmed. I was also thinking about the events taking place in my classroom without me. I purposefully looked directly at him and said little until the end when I asked some clarifying questions to make sure I fully understood his intent.

In this occurrence, I'm wondering which selves I am using or displaying. I'm posing this question to myself because I wish to gain a more fuller understanding of this incident. Using Harré's definition of the self as a site "from which a person perceives the world and a place form which to act" (3), I'm reflecting upon my actions in relation to my self. The idea of three selves offers me a broad view in which to examine my actions. But in reliving the incident, I'm not sure I can isolate such definite acts using a view as broad as Harré's. Just the act of crossing my arms could be a trait I copied from my mother (Self 2) or a purposeful act to give a specific impression to the parent (Self 3).

Adding Goffman's (1972) interaction ritual to Harré's view that "each unique human being is a complicated patchwork of ever changing personal attributes and relations" (2) helps me to more fully understand my actions. In this short episode with the parent, I worked to maintain personal equilibrium (tried to show no emotion), used avoidance face work as a defense measure (did not engage in the topic), experienced out of face interaction (topic was sudden and unexpected), and definitely left the situation in a wrong face (personally unsettled because it didn't support my internal image) (Goffman, 1972). Harré's views on personal singularity and sense of self tells me of my individuality which encourages me to look inward for understanding, while Goffman's interaction rituals allow me to pinpoint specific actions within my particular and individual self. So for me, maybe it's not an issue of identifying which self, but recognizing Harré's view that I am a complex being with a sense of self which enables me to examine my actions.

I'm interrupting the account of this particular incident to insert an important element. After writing this account, I sent it off to share with Jack and he responded

> Hi Terri... I gave Sarah your piece where you are writing about the multiplicity of self and the ideas of Harre on Self 1, Self 2, and Self 3. Sarah said, "I don't think that is what Harre is meaning." She is going to write a brief letter to you explaining her own interpretations. See if your interpretation of Harré's piece changes in relation to Sarah's understandings.

This is an interesting note from Jack. He has very seldom explicitly told me that my thinking is incorrect. He shares his thinking and then uses phrases such as "see what you think" or "see if you can". Here he uses Sarah's comment as a directive message to change my thinking. On that same day, Sarah wrote a long note to me explaining her interpretation of Harré's work regarding the self in relation to her view of multiplicity of selves.

> What he is examining in the three selves he puts forward is a way of ordering perceptions of the public and private aspects of Self and how they

inter-relate. That is fundamentally different from the way I am talking about self...

I responded to Sarah by restating my new understandings gained from her electronic conversation.

Okay, I'm with you when you say that Harré believes everyone consists of ever-changing personal attributes and relations. Now the way I understand it is that he believes that the three selves are an organizational tool for the private and public selves and how they inter-relate. Is this correct? Self 1 represents the self in relation to the world. You, however, have a more multiple view here. You see yourself as many selves depending on the context and the interaction happening. Self 2 is the person's attributes. This includes the genetic make-up and the factors of environment. Self 3 is the impression we make on others during interaction situations. Sarah, does this include the impressions we give off even if we don't verbally interact? I'm thinking of someone walking into a room....I haven't looked at my passage yet, so now I'll go back and reread what I wrote yesterday to see where my confusion lies.

From there I returned to Harré's text, my writing, and the notes for Sarah and revised my thinking. With Sarah's help, I was able to correct my interpretation and gain a more complete understanding of Harré's ideas of self. The account you read about is the result of my interaction with Sarah.

I debated whether to include my discussions with Sarah in this thesis. After my interactions with Sarah, I sent a note to Jack

While driving to school today, I thought about including the dialogue that Sarah and I are having about Harré. I would also like to continue talking with her a bit. I believe she

> can help me to fully understand his thinking. I thought about whether this would be appropriate or not. It's so much like opening myself as I did when writing about the communities. There is a risk. In one sense it demonstrates my willingness to learn, on the other side it shows I didn't get it the first time.

Jack quickly replied with

> I think this is really important Terri... Showing you didn't get it the first time, and then engaging with others in ways which clearly take you learning forward will be one of the first times I've seen an educative influence explained.

Sarah did help me extend my understanding. Through a positive and congenial conversation, she helped me see Harré's work in a new way. In a message sent to both Sarah and me, Jack pointed out

> I think you are both showing how you bring the ethic of care into your mentoring/educative relationships and on this basis can offer implicit/explicit criticism and ideas which help others to move their learning forward.

The final element of this occurrence was my ability to refocus all my selves on the needed task of writing. Working with a time constraint, I knew I couldn't afford to miss any writing time, yet despite all my efforts, it did take me an evening and a day before I could return to the computer. During that hazy time, I savored the encouraging comments from my phone calls to parents and I reviewed in my mind all my positive actions within my classroom. I believe I was using the same kind of imagery and visualization that Sarah Fletcher uses to understand herself and her practice (1999). But in this instance, I used the technique as a way to strengthen my view of myself in order to be able to return to the task at hand. Jack accurately summarized my efforts when he wrote:

> Hi Terri - I really like your points about emotion and the way you have "pulled yourself together" - I am still amazed at that mysterious quality which enables us to "form ourselves" from the feeling of being fragmented.

In thinking about this incident in relation to my attention on community, I was deeply concerned that others within the parent community would hold the same view as the irate parent. Despite wanting to withdraw, as I did from Jack's voluminous e-mail, I gathered myself together and contacted each parent. My desire to hold the community together was stronger than my personal hurt. I also wanted to show the parents that I value their opinions. If they shared the same view as the concerned parent, I knew I needed to make major changes in my behavior. In the end I was personally strengthened from the individual contact. As painful as this incident was, I used the opportunity to critically examine my actions, to make personal contact with parents, to consider the self aspect of my being, and to practice focusing my selves in one direction.

In considering my work that I've shared with you in this thesis, I feel my greatest understandings have started from those instances when I was emotionally drawn into the moment and responded with personal feelings. The refocus of my parent community research came when I grasped how much I enjoyed visiting in Jesse's home. The realization of my power in the classroom began with my deep concern for John's embarrassment about his haircut. Creating community with my sixth graders began with a personal desire to embrace each as a unique individual, as well as an eagerness to have them experience a collective supportive community. And finally, leaving Richardson Elementary was extremely heart-wrenching, but from it I came to fully understand the strength of convictions in my personal beliefs, and I went on to more fully live out my values by helping to create Chinook Charter School.

Living and Linguistic Concepts

The discussion about the significance of emotion flowed into a conversation about ways to communicate that emotional meaning. As I examined the Leitch and Day text, I focused on their belief that reflection needs to be explicitly taught to educators, so that emotional moments can be transformed into episodes of insight and lead to changes of action (2000). On September 20, I shared my thinking with Jack:

> The whole next section implies, I believe, that thinking must be taught or structured so that teachers can learn how to reflect while in the

moment. I was trying to sort out how I reflect while in action. In my thesis, I write it all out so that the reader can be with me, but I don't believe I think in such a linear, concrete way. My thoughts are just there, jumbled along with my observations, my feelings, my goals, my values, my readings, and my memory of past experiences. They all sort of meld together in a tiny pinch of time to guide my actions.

The other idea I wonder about is the fact that teachers have to be explicitly taught how to reflect. While this idea is interesting, I don't know how I would teach someone to reflect in action. It's not dependent on words but on intuitive action based on all that stuff in my mind. Leitch and Day make it sound like I'm constructing sentences in my mind based on what I'm seeing. If I did it that way, then that specific moment would flash by and another episode would be up for reflection. I wouldn't have time to act on my thinking and the classroom would be a very exciting place since I wouldn't have time to interact with the students.

I was struggling with a way to talk about my thinking process. My words seemed inadequate for the description I was trying to convey. Jack offered insight that helped me to more clearly define my struggle:

Whilst Leitch and Day write about the importance of emotion, I'm thinking that the linguistic/ conceptual form of their communication may be masking the communication of emotional meanings.

In a later communication he continues this thought.

Now, the kind of conceptualizing shown in the paper is solely linguistic and abstract in the

sense that understanding what it is to have a concept involves grasping a principle and the ability to use words correctly. . . . The words that I use to describe the nature of this form of dialectical/living conceptualizing, which refers to the meaning of values embodied in your practices and forms of life, are on pages 32/33 of Volume 1 of my thesis on "How do I improve my practice? Creating a discipline of education through educational enquiry". Do see if the ideas speak to you.

In my next note, I used Jack as a conversational partner as I worked to sort out my understanding of his thinking in his thesis.

I'd like to think through some thoughts to see if I understand your ideas. Having a concept lies within the linguistic view, where not only understanding the principle is important, but it's of equal importance to be able to clearly verbalize the meaning to others. These result in statements, propositions, and theory. I see the "I" as static and detached here. It's a claim to know, but I don't see personal involvement or personal growth. Is this true?

On the other hand, Being a concept is one of continual change and embodies the idea of living. It's your living educational theory where from the process of reflection and aligning values and actions, the "I" continually changes to reflect the new understandings gained. The "I" is definitely not static, but growing. The dialectic is a tool used to sharpen personal perspective through interactions with fellow researchers, but the dialectic cannot adequately describe through linguistic concepts how we become who we are (Whitehead, 1999). To do that, we need to be creative and find other

ways in which to communicate that kind of growth.

Jack responded,

This seems to me to be true. The living "I" tends to be discounted in the propositional forms of theory. Linguistic conceptual abstract treats the living "I" in terms of conscious lived experience as being insignificant.

The moment I worked through my response to Jack, I experienced one of those "Ahas". Suddenly I understood my struggle in constructing this thesis. By putting Jack's idea of living concept next to Leitch and Day's idea of linguistic concept, I could see what I was attempting to do and what I worked to overcome. I wanted to capture those split-second moments in my head, along with the feelings of the relationships embodied in each of the communities. I also wanted to share with you the strength of my values as I worked to live them in my actions. Finally, I wanted you to fully understand my struggles. I truly wanted you to be with me.

To do this, I had to make my account alive. I had to move past the propositional approach and insert my "I". I believe I had to live within this document. The narratives, the Alaskan accounts, the words and the constructing framework are an extension of my self.

I view my electronic correspondence with Jack in the same way. I have worked to make them living and a part of me, not a distant representation of my thoughts. On September 20, I wrote a letter that illustrates living aspects of my writing.

Dear Jack (and Sarah [Fletcher], if you're there too),

I'm sitting here at my computer trying to sort out my discontent. I'm trying to decide if I'm just grumpy from staying up too late or not being with my kids today. Or if I'm just being stubborn and not willing to think hard. . . . I think I always go through this internal struggle of resistance each time I start a critical reflection piece of writing. . . . I always

> struggle with how to "critically examine" someone's idea and still support them and not disrupt their integrity. I feel like I pay a high personal cost when I engage in this type of writing. It's 8:30 a.m. and it's finally light outside. I'm going to go sweep the deck and will return a nicer person who is ready to work.
>
> Love,
> Terri

A Scholarship of Inquiry

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) speculate that, "Perhaps it is the particular time in our history to take stock of where we are, to think about where we are going, to try to imagine a new future" (1061). A number of educators are taking up this challenge and offering possible paths for the education profession. Lomax (1999) and Whitehead (1999) propose a new discipline of educational inquiry which includes action research and self reflection; Zeichner (1999) indicates the significance of S-Step in relation to a new scholarship within teacher education; Hamilton and Pinnegar (1998) point out the promise of self-study; Gergen and Gergen (2000) recommend embracing the innovative aspects of qualitative research; and Leitch and Day (2000) suggest a more holistic view of action research.

In this section, I would like us to consider a comment by Hamilton and Pinnegar (1998). They note that real and authentic work moves "understanding forward in research of teacher education" (241). I believe the teacher educators in S-Step engage in the type of real work described by Hamilton and Pinnegar, and for that reason I would like us to consider S-Step in relation to Leitch and Day's holistic model of action research.

A Holistic Model of Action Research

In this definition, Leitch and Day point out the necessary ingredients for this type of action research.

> A holistic vision of reflective teaching, however, has yet to be achieved. What is required for teacher educators and those involved in the action research-reflection debate is a greater clarity of thinking about the connections between what reflection, being a reflective practitioner-action research, and being a professional involves. (186)

I suggest that S-Step is currently living out the practices Leitch and Day say haven't yet been achieved. Let's look at why I believe this to be so. Leitch and Day are asking for clearer illustrations and analysis of those examples between being a reflective educator and being a professional educator. I believe they are also asking for more explicit thinking concerning the implications of reflection and the professional. I believe the work of those teacher educators involved in S-Step has shown these types of connections and thinking.

Hamilton and Pinnegar (1998) describe the characteristics of self-study as,

> the study of one's self, one's actions, one's ideas, as well as the "not self". It is autobiographical, historical, cultural, and political and it draws on one's life, but is more than that. Self study also involves a thoughtful look at texts read, experiences had, people known, and ideas considered. These are investigated for their connections with and relationships to practice as a teacher educator. (236)

Inherent in this definition is the active practice of reflection. Reflection used in this sense is a tool for examining personal practices in relation to others, personal actions, and personal beliefs which often leads to a change in practice. Using examples from the proceedings of the Third International Conference on Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices (Loughran & Russell, 2000), I would like to illustrate how teacher educators are currently living and practicing what Leitch and Day refer to a as a "holistic model of action research".

Anne Freese, Clare Kosnik and Vicki LaBoskey (2000) share a paper documenting their growth in understanding and practices of self-study through electronic mail correspondence. One of their goals in this study was to improve personal professional practice while at the same time gaining a clearer understanding of their individual selves and a deeper understanding of self-study. In their conclusion, they offer a clear connection between their reflections concerning self-study and the influence that has on their practice: "...by committing ourselves to taking risks, reflecting on our practice, and repositioning ourselves as collaborators, we can effect change in our practice, and assist other teacher educators to recognize their stories, their assumptions, attitudes and tensions." (79).

Another teacher educator, Joe Senese (2000), focuses his self-study on his experience of returning to a high school classroom teaching situation. He illustrates the connection between reflection and practice as he monitors his changes over time. Joe concludes: "The beauty of self-study is that it deepens our self-awareness while concomitantly shaping our behaviors with others.... The worth of my self-study goes

beyond the personal because this journey has given rise to philosophical beliefs about the nature of teaching and learning that have affected others." (232).

Amanda Berry and John Loughran (2000) share the experiences of collaboration as their self-study. By being critical friends, they note the importance of such roles by saying, "It has offered us ways of reframing episodes we jointly shared as our different skills and experiences influenced what we saw and understood" (28).

These six teacher educators illustrate their personal connection between reflection and practice. Hamilton and Pinnegar (1998) note that self-study is a "commitment to examining one's own practice to bring into action the values that underlie their practice" (1). Those involved in self-study not only use reflection for self-examination, but also show the consequences of self-reflection as thinking changes, and as a result, practice is transformed.

After reading Leitch and Day's chapter, Jack and I discussed the idea of holistic action research. In a note, I expressed surprise with the view of action research not being considered a holistic endeavor.

> I always through action research/teacher research was rather holistic. I never saw any limitations on it at all. The use of narrative to share research, inserting the 'I' into the writing, using ethnographic tools to gather data, the use of a supportive community. Since I'm up here in the frozen north, I assumed that teacher research could be as we (ATRN) or I created it to fulfill whatever was needed at the time. I didn't see boundaries.
>
> Maybe this is part of Donmoyer's balkanization idea. Are those boundaries being created by people in power positions because of the way they verbalize (or write) ideas? Is there a need to draw such firm lines? Will the boundaries be different for different people depending on individual thinking, so do there have to be universal boundaries? Should I let other people set them for me? What makes their boundaries or thinking more important than mine?

Jack replied rather swiftly with

> Is there a need to draw such firm lines? I think we need some lines so that we can distinguish what 'game' we are playing.... In relation to teacher-research and action-research we have traditions of enquiry within which a range of definitions is used. I think you could help your readers to understand your 'rules' in relation to others who may think they are playing the same 'game'. I think you should let other people set the rules for you, only insomuch as they help your enquiry to move forward.
>
> I think their boundaries or thinking may be more important than yours if the purpose of enquiry is to make a contribution to educational knowledge and you acknowledge at a particular time that someone else's thinking is helping your own to move forward.

I chose not to continue this conversation at that time because I wasn't sure how I felt about Jack's ideas. Join me as I tried to sort out my thinking on this issue. On the one hand, I do realize I am a qualitative researcher, not a quantitative one. I also have a firm belief in the value of self-study, teacher research, and action research and understand the foundations on which they are built. My experience in attending AERA has shown me the various divisions and differing viewpoints within the educational profession, and I can now identify those whose opinions differ from mine. I also understand Jack's point about positioning my work in relationship to other work so you, the reader, can gain a sharper image of my thoughts. I do agree with that.

But there's something in Jack's response that makes me uncomfortable. It might be the idea that others set the 'rules' for me. Maybe it's in his wording or in his use of rules, but as a professional educator, I believe I have expertise and knowledge to consider the ideas of others from a wide range of fields. Whether I accept or set the idea aside for the moment, I have challenged my thinking in some way.

In considering Leitch and Day's holistic model of action research, I've gained a more precise picture of self-study and my work as presented here. Leitch and Day believe the inclusion of the emotional dimension is an important factor in action

research. They contend, "there must be a conceptual understanding of the nature of emotional understanding, and its links to change process in individuals...." The collage work by Guilfoyle, Hamilton, Pinnegar, and Placier (2000) fully illustrates the emotional connections and implications for their self-study. *Gretel and Hansel: Research in the Woods*, a play by ATRN members (Austin, 1996), present the tensions between personal and professional aspects of teacher research. Likewise, the *Prom Dresses Are Us?* drama by Weber and Mitchell (2000) actively demonstrates the strong link and implications between emotions and inquiry. I also believe my thesis is a living example of this idea. I have fully described those moments when my feelings caused me to consider my actions. This study would be very incomplete without the inclusion of my emotions. So while I disagree with Leitch and Day that a holistic model of action research has not been attained, there are elements within their proposal that I find helpful in gaining a clearer view of self-study as lived in action by S-Step and in relooking at my work as presented here.

An International Response

In the middle of our ongoing electronic mail discussions about the Leitch and Day article, Jack shared a draft proposal he had received from the Economic and Social Science Research Council. Since we both share an interest in the ethics of educational research, Jack thought I might want to enter into the conversation. In his next message, he provided background information about the ESRC.

> The ESRC is the Economic and Social Science Research Council which funds much of our educational research in England. The draft guidelines are almost finished and will be used to 'train' every educational researcher who is funded from ESRC money.

After reading the proposed guidelines, I constructed this response from my position as chair of S-Step and endeavored to live my values by offering an alternative to traditional criticism as well as demonstrating my belief in community. The following letter was directed to the five panel members who make up the Education Subject Area Panel.

Dear Panel Members,

Recently, Dr. Jack Whitehead, University of Bath, forwarded your draft of training guidelines for educational researchers. We both share an interest in the ethics of educational research and he believed I would be interested in reading your

proposal. As chair of Self-Study for Teacher Education Practices, a special education group within the American Education Research Association, I would like to share some thoughts with you about your proposed research training guidelines. I believe you have undertaken a laudable task and I can only imagine the substantial amount of hard work of your panel in preparing this draft. I truly appreciate your openness in seeking other opinions, and in my position as the chair of Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices, would like to share mine with you. As a practicing educational researcher who is constantly seeking to improve my practice through consistent, systematic, reflective inquiry, I feel my thoughts could add to your discussions as you prepare your final proposal.

My attention is focused around four questions and I wonder if you could help me to understand by responding to each of them in turn.

What is your purpose in producing these guidelines?

Where is the individual teacher researcher in relation to your guidelines?

How is the individual researcher to be supported?

How do your guidelines help research move forward?

What is your purpose in producing these guidelines?

Your draft reflects your deep commitment to your task, and I can see you truly desire individuals to be thoroughly knowledgeable in all areas of research. But when the educator completes all that you have mentioned, what manner of researcher will they be? From reading your draft, I feel they will have an extensive knowledge of many types of research, a vast array of ways to conduct research, and the ability to analyze and manage data. All of this information is doubtless helpful, but will they be researchers? In other words, will the students you are seeking to influence be transformed into life-long teacher researchers?

Richard Pring (2000), an eminent philosopher of education in Britain, recently published *The Philosophy of Educational Research.* In his conclusion, he notes "...research is of little use unless it is understood and internalized by those who do the practicing." (159). Similarly, Leitch and Day (2000), both British educators, point out the importance of internal beliefs. They believe that being a reflective practitioner requires a "set of attitudes" directed "towards practice based upon broader understandings of self, society and moral purposes..." (181). As a reflective teacher educator, I agree. When I work with beginning teacher researchers, one of my major goals is to help them see their practice through questioning eyes. I attempt to help them reposition themselves in relation to their practice, their personal actions, and their students. Berthoff (1987) calls this a "re-seeing" or a re-considering of what surrounds them as they begin to develop a research attitude.

Barnes (1998) describes this underlying research attitude as "changes in the unconscious frames of reference that shape their perceptions of what is possible..." (xii). This shift in thinking is an active, engaging enterprise. It's something that I had to personally do and an act that beginning teacher researchers need to do also. As I explain to my preservice teachers, as an educational researcher who engages in self-study, I am aware of the interlocking relationship between my practice, my beliefs, my theoretical understanding, and my research. Each adds to, defines and helps shape the other. As a result, I create my own knowledge. Research, for me, is not static, but a living action that is part of all that I do, and it begins with my moving into the stance of a researcher. This is, I believe, at the heart of S-Step.

So, to return to my original question: *What is your purpose?* If your purpose is to transmit information about being a researcher, I believe you have achieved your goal. If, however, you wish to help develop individual educational researchers and encourage research to occur, I would like you to reconsider your draft. You have a broad list of ideas and concepts that you wish students to know. As they are presented here, they are discrete and singular. Is there a way you can link them in order to show the living relationships between them? That would be a beginning step in developing a sense of action, which I believe is missing in your work as it is currently written.

Next, I would welcome discussion about how your recommendations might encourage and develop that internal attitude that Pring, Day, Leitch, Barnes and I feel is so necessary. Without it, I believe many educators receiving your information will not research from the heart, but will only do what you immediately ask of them. If you wish the students to continue to be researchers long after your support, then I would look for ways to help individual teacher practitioners make the transformation into living and responsible researchers.

Where is the individual teacher researcher in relation to your guidelines?

When I read your guidelines I began to feel unsettled about your exclusion of the individual within your proposal. Though you explain all that the participants will need to learn, and you use words such as "should have training", "become competent", "should understand", you don't directly address the researcher as a person engaging in a complex and personal enterprise.

I think in some degree this certainly comes from the way the draft is constructed. At first glance your use of a prepositional linguistic type of writing is appropriate since you are constructing guidelines which will be disseminated nationally. Hirst and Peters (1970) explain linguistic sense as "understanding what it is to have a concept in the sense of grasping a principle and the ability to use words correctly". I see this as a rather static stance with any personal aspect removed. Part of your task, understandably, is to make your ideas clearly available. But isn't another

part of your task to set the tone for the educational research that will be undertaken under your auspices? If that is true, and I believe it to be so, then what is your proposal saying about your belief in the individual educator as researcher?

Russell (1998) claims that *how* we teach may have more influence than *what* we teach and that education can be one of the easiest places in which to experience one's self as a "living contradiction" (Whitehead, 1993). Your draft proposal may be a good place for all of you to re-examine your personal views concerning the value of the individual within a research context in relation to the writing you have produced. You list philosophical issues, research design, methods of data collection and analysis, and managing and presenting data, as essential topics of understanding. These all talk about what the researcher should do, but where do you focus on the educator as researcher? Where does the actual researcher emerge among all these topics you identify as being necessary to comprehend?

I believe you need to address the issue of the individual, and strongly urge you to consider and honor the place of the person within your research recommendations.

How is the Individual Educational Researcher Supported?

Again, I believe you need to explain your purpose for initiating these research guidelines because I am convinced that this will influence how the individual is nurtured. As I mentioned before, if your goal is to have individuals complete your program, then a focus on the student can be minimal. If, however, you hold a long-term view of the possibilities of research, then I believe there is a need to consider how the beginning teacher researcher will be supported and cared for throughout this program and for several years afterward.

In examining teacher research communities, Cochran and Lytle (1993) conclude that "for teachers to carry out the systematic and self-critical inquiry that teacher research entails, teachers will need to establish networks and create forums so that ongoing collaboration is possible" (22). Pring (2000) also supports the need for a community setting for teacher researchers. He views it as a forum where "problems can be shared, possible solutions identified, ideas and hypotheses put to the test, tentative conclusions reached, and criticism invited both of the conclusions and of the research methods adopted" (155).

As both a participant in the S-Step community and as a co-creator of the Alaskan Teacher Research Network, I can speak from experience regarding the value of such communities. These are places where much learning takes place for the novice as well as the experienced researcher. And as Pring (2000) describes, these communities are places where issues and understandings can be explored, tested and re-considered.

I have found in the ATRN community, that those teacher researchers who work in isolation frequently fade away, never to return. Research is just too hard and too complex to be done single-handedly.

As you begin this program, you have the ideal opportunity to put such supportive and nurturing communities in place. Not only would you be showing your attention and individual concern for individual researchers, but you would be providing a model for other groups to follow. Because I have seen so many teachers become passionate researchers who transform their practice through the supportive interaction with colleagues, I cannot ignore the influence and power of community.

How Do Your Guidelines Help Educational Research Move Foreword?

Ten years from now, where would you like to be in terms of educational research in your country? Will these guidelines get you to that destination? I'd like to share a little about S-Step because I think it will illustrate my final suggestion. As I mentioned before, S-Step is a special interest group of AERA. It's relatively young, but has quickly grown into the largest SIG of AERA and has been recognized by Ken Zeichner, in his 1999 AERA vice-presidential address as "the single most significant development ever in the field of teacher education research" (8).

I think there are four elements that have contributed to S-Step's growth and noted significance. The first is that our research is grounded in the living issues of our practice. We examine those tensions we find within our work, and as a result we are passionate about what we research. We believe we must live our talk. As a result, the issue of integrity arises as we work to align our practice with our beliefs (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 1998). We honor the entire person. Emotional incidents comprising frustration, anger, satisfaction and puzzlement can be moments of learning. We don't shy away from these, but use them as steps to move us toward clearer understandings.

The second element found within S-Step is our creation of knowledge. Through questioning we arrive at new understandings. We continually question each other about our work, our methodology, our conclusions. The view that we are "living contradictions", who develop personal living theories continually, nudges us to question our actions, our motives, our beliefs (Whitehead, 1993). Our questions originate from our practice. They are real and reflect real incidents of tension or wonderings. As a result of the continual inquiry, and because we "are living what we learn, new knowledge emerges" (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 1998, p. 242).

The next important characteristic of S-Step involves community. A caring, supporting community provides the environment where we openly examine our actions in relation to our practice. Because we value each other and the work that emerges, S-Step is a place where it is acceptable to admit disasters and celebrate new

insights. Both are equally encouraged. There's a sense of energy that comes from being together, as we realize we can learn from each other by supporting everyone's efforts.

Within the community, we struggle with authentic concerns arising in our practice. We examine the political aspects surrounding our work (Hamilton, 2000, Austin, 1998); we strive to create valid standards of judgment (Whitehead, 2000, Lighthall, 2000, Squires, 1998); we confront issues of race, ethnicity and gender (Brown, 2000; Guidry & Corbett-Whittier, 2000; Weber & Mitchell, 2000, Hamilton & Guilfoyle, 1998). We come to our own understandings of these issues as we grapple with them in real contexts. S-Step gatherings offer us a place to pause, take a breath and see what we are about.

Finally, because of the nature of the S-Step community, we are willing to take risks. Just as we flourish on asking questions, we "acknowledge and rejoice in the uncertainty of the current world (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 1998, p. 235). We are not tentative about taking risks in representation of our work or about the topics for research. We are also redefining the expectations of an AERA SIG by convening outside the normal AERA conference and collectively publishing the accounts of our research.

I would like to suggest to you to look again at your proposal in light of the following question: *What type of educational researchers to you wish to see in ten years?* I believe if you want engaged, active, and personally excited educational researchers you need to provide support for a living, nurturing community which encourages personal reflection, values innovation and creativity, believes in the simultaneous examination of theory, practice and beliefs, and honors the educator as a creator of knowledge. If you do, does your proposal offer this to your new researchers?

There is one final concern I would like to share, and it has to do with the inclusion of educational research with the social sciences.
Pring (2000) points out that "Educational research—understanding an educational practice—draws upon social science research. But it is something more" (159). He asserts that the complexity within educational practice is only understood by those whose "values, beliefs, and understandings make it a practice of a certain sort" and that "an educational practice embodies a way of thinking about learning"(159). This characterizes educational research with a body of knowledge which builds upon the social science area, but also steps beyond into its own arena.

Many prominent educators are showing how education is a field of a "certain sort". Lomax (1999) and Whitehead (1999) describe a new discipline of educational inquiry; Zeichner (1999) lists the attributes of a new scholarship in teacher education; Denzin and Lincoln (2000) characterize the attributes of a qualitative researcher;

Hamilton (1998) presents accounts of knowledge creation within self-study; and Ghaye (2000) provides a public forum for reflective conversations with the publication of *Reflective Practice*.

In addition, I believe S-Step is a living example of Pring's assertions. Those of us involved in self-study examine our practice, and as we do so, we create our own descriptions and explanations for our learning, making self-study a living practice of a "certain sort". The proceedings from the three International Conferences of Self-Study (Richard,1996; Cole & Finley,1998; Loughran & Russell, 2000) are a public account and examples of how our research informs and guides our educational and personal actions. And as those accounts illustrate, we are studying our practices as professional educators—as both knowledge-creators and teachers. Finally, as educational researchers, we hold our accounts up to be judged using our values as our standards of practice. There is an integrity and voice within our work which commands attention.

The problem in trying to create a research program encompassing so many professions, as you have done here, is that the program ends up being so generalized it does not recognize the integrity, the complexity, the individual body of knowledge, or the specific research needs of any.

You have such an outstanding opportunity to create a sense of excitement and enthusiasm regarding educational research and the chance to help transform educators into active life-long inquirers. I hope you recognize the importance of the task and seize the moment.

Sincerely,
Terri Austin, Chair
Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices

I'm including my response to the ESRC as an example of my alternative form to traditional criticism. My purpose was to create a reply which was supportive of the panel members for the efforts shown in constructing the draft. I also wanted them to understand that I value their commitment to the task. But I also wanted to make sure they understood my concern. I worked to balance the tone of this response. This was also an opportunity to share the contributions of S-Step with the hope the panel members would come to see another view of research. Finally, when I write a responsive/critical reply, I find the composing process helps me to further clarify my thinking and moves my thinking forward. In this instance, I had to isolate the essence of S-Step. This required me to think sharply and precisely to identify the essential elements of self-study and S-Step.

Influencing Others

The final theme that emerged from my electronic dialogue with Jack is the idea of influencing others. His ideas and questions continually challenged my understanding, but as we sent messages back and forth, it became evident that there were times when my ideas were directly influencing Jack's thinking and actions. I would like to share three examples of those moments to illustrate the broader possibilities of my ideas. The first concerns Jack's rethinking of the representation of his ideas, another involves his change in a personal interaction with a colleague, and the final example is his construction of a response to a political action within his university.

In the middle of September, Jack and I were discussing the Leitch and Day (2000) article in relationship to the way I create unity within my life, when he wrote

> You have helped to take my own understanding forward with your original contribution to educational knowledge. This is helping me to include my practice of community, moved by the spirit of your enquiry, within my research, mentoring and supervision. I'm thinking particularly of the way you show the meanings of the relational values which are embodied in your educational practices of community (this includes your language). What I relate to is the way you clarify the meanings of your educational values through your practices of community at the same time as you are using these values as your standards of practice and critical judgement in your knowledge-creation, through your teacher-research

Later, as we continued discussing the Leitch and Day article, Jack reflected on his use of language.

> You set me thinking about the adequacy of propositional discourse for communicating the meanings of emotions embodied in what we do....It could be that my questions of the kind, "How do I improve what I am doing?", give the

> mistaken impression that they are formed independently of social contexts, their formations and systems. I do not mean to give that impression.... You've got me thinking.

Two days later, Jack sent me a copy of his response to Ruth Leitch and Chris Day's article. I was struck by Jack's effort to quietly put himself into the text. I knew he was troubled by the way Leitch and Day positioned his living educational theory to their views of a holistic model of action research. This short paragraph, taken from his letter to Leitch and Day, illustrates how he dealt with his discontent while working to demonstrate a positive relationship with both Ruth and Chris.

> I really liked the way you related to my own ideas on the creation of living educational theories. I was wondering about the "independent of but has clear parallels with" (p. 188). As I engage with your ideas I want to retain a sense of my own individual integrity and therefore like the idea of independence. I also want to acknowledge a kind of dependency (rather than being parallel which suggests that we don't touch each other) on your ideas and your responses in helping me to take my own ideas forward.

In his next note Jack shared his intent in the construction of his response to Ruth and Chris.

> In my response I felt that you would recognize my embrace of your value of community in seeking to hold the warmth of my own humanity in my recognition of the value and integrity in the warmth of humanity of Ruth and Chris. You have seen me ignore this quality in my questioning "Do you have any evidence that you have influenced the learning of anyone?", in contexts such as AERA! I really worked at offering my critical judgements in ways which do not violate your valuing of relationships in community.

The second example of my influence with Jack concerns the planning of a celebration for a colleague, John. John, well liked by everyone, was retiring with the knowledge of a serious illness. While thinking about this, Jack recognized his hostile feelings for another colleague, Sam and decided to initiate change. This is what Jack shared with me.

> In marked contrast to the delight and warmth I feel for John, I have another colleague, Sam, to whom I have felt a reciprocated and sustained hostility for various reasons. Thinking of John and the positive qualities he has brought into my life, the spontaneous thought emerged that it would be fitting to invite Sam to work with me in planning an appropriate celebration and acknowledgment of our affection and high regard for John. Sam readily agreed and this lunchtime we have organized a department meeting to plan a fitting tribute to John. I think you are both with me in helping me to keep John's spirit of community alive in my relationships with others.

The final example I want to share with you focuses on Jack's response to a personal appraisal within his university. In this excerpt, Jack tells me about his attempts to incorporate some of my influence in his statement to the University.

> I want to share with you my latest attempt to integrate my learning from your thesis in my practical life. You can see this in the extract from my appraisal 2000 form which I handed in last week. The extract focuses on a tension which is getting in the way of me feeling at one with the University as a community of scholars and other colleagues.... Through the influence of my learning from your thesis, about how to sustain relationship and exercise criticism in ways which do not violate the values which help to "regain the wholeness of being human", I have

> written the following for my appraisal 2000. I am hopeful that you will feel the influence of your thesis.

Throughout his appraisal response, Jack openly, but evenly shares his feelings of discontent with the university's actions. He ends his comments with

> It may sound somewhat churlish to say that I did not feel a sense of celebration in being given an extra scale point for my long service and international contribution following your recommendation last year. I appreciated your efforts on my behalf and thanked you for them. My lack of a feeling of genuine celebration, unlike the delight we both felt when I received my Ph.D. degree from you, was due to the feeling that I really have deserved a promotion which recognized my contribution to educational research and scholarship.

For the past few years, Jack has posed the question "How do I know that I have influenced you for good?" (Whitehead, 1998, 2000). I am borrowing his personal inquiry and applying it to myself in relationship to Jack. Jack, how do I know that I have influenced you for good? My evidence is the above excerpts from our on-going dialogue and your writing. I've known you for over six years and I've seen a transformation in your approach to others. I definitely don't assume the change has been only my doing as you've discussed and written about the influences of Ben Cunningham, Pat D'Darcy, Moira Laidlaw, and now Sarah Fletcher.

The area in which I think I have positively influenced you is an awareness of how your actions and words hold the possibility of creating and demonstrating caring relationships with others. You've watched me struggle as I worked to compose an alternative form of criticism that would align with my values and belief in community I've invited you into my life, and as a result, you've "experienced by association" my tensions, dilemmas, and inner conflicts as well as seen how I creatively resolved them. You've endured much with me and I'm pleased you see value in my work.

Fall comes quickly here. In two to three weeks, the birch and aspen leaves turn golden yellow, become dull, and eventually flutter to the ground. This fall, the wind has churned and whisked the leaves off the trees; no serene floating this season.

Writing the epilogue has been quite similar to the fall season of the past two weeks. The intense dialogue with Jack has clarified and extended my understandings at a rapid pace. During those moments when I attempt to sort out my thinking by sweeping the piles of leaves off the porch, I continually return to the questions of what do I know and how do I know it?

In an ending discussion of the Third International Conference on Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices, Gaalen Erikson emphasized the importance of pushing the conversation forward by focusing on the questions concerning the nature of the knowledge created. I'm choosing to take that challenge and share what I have come to realize through this thesis.

In regard to what do I know and how do I know it?, I believe I provide one answer to Schon's (1995) call for a new epistemology in a new form of scholarship. In this thesis, I show how I create my own knowledge by blending my practice, personal creativity, intuition, and theoretical frameworks. Through imaginative structuring of this thesis, I've clearly shown my thinking while in action and my reflection on my practice. By making my thoughts explicit, I've invited you into my thinking process in order for you to understand what prompts and underlies my actions. And through my actions and practice, I've identified and clarified my values which I use as my standard of judgment. I've shown you how I create my original knowledge that informs my practice.

I also believe I have clarified the meaning of my personal and professional values though my practices of community. In the four accounts, I've attempted to provide you with many clear examples of how I worked to identify my values through creating and fostering the growth of community. There is also a fifth community in this thesis and that is the relationship between you and I. Through this text, I've worked to continue to live out my values to create an inviting relationship with you. Through my stories of Alaska and my family, I've welcomed you into my life. I've also shared the difficult and tension filled episodes of my life in order to give you a more complete view of who I am.

I also know that while I support Leitch and Day's idea of a holistic model of action research (2000), I have moved beyond it. Realizing that linguistic text, used by Leitch and Day, falls short of capturing the emotion they discuss, I've practiced creating living explanations (Whitehead, 1999). By including my "I" and using narrative, I can more fully capture and communicate the emotions and values necessary for you to understand my thoughts and practice.

I know that I'm a living contradiction who creates her own living educational theory (Whitehead, 1992). I've demonstrated in this thesis the process of developing my own educational theory. I've given examples when I negate my values and the consequences of my actions. I've also shown how my "I" changes over time and through interactions with the thoughts and the conversations of others while using the dialectic as a tool to make my ideas clear to you. This Epilogue especially demonstrates this idea.

I believe I show I've created educational knowledge in such a way that respects the integrity of educational practice. While I gain information from the ideas and insights of others in a variety of disciplines, the knowledge I create is centered around the relationship among those ideas, my intuition, my actions, my observations, my values, and my creativity. My knowledge is grounded in my practice "of a certain sort" (Pring, 2000). My response to the ESRC also demonstrates the value I hold regarding the integrity of educational practice.

I demonstrate a living logic based on a practical logic as defined by Bourdeiu (1990). He defines a practical logic as:

able to organize all thoughts, perceptions, and actions by means of a few generative principles, which are closely interrelated and constitute a practically integrated whole, only because its whole economy, based on the principle of the economy of logic, presupposes a sacrifice of rigour for the sake of simplicity and generality (86)

Bourdeiu also asserts that simplicity does not mean illogical or invalid, but that logic borne out of practice should be practical, coherent, and match the objective conditions. One of my goals in constructing this thesis was to make my thinking clear to you. I describe in an earlier chapter how I envisioned a practicing educator and wrote directly to her. This was how I endeavored to make sure I wrote in clear and understandable ideas.

Going one step further, I believe I present a living practical logic. In my connected conversation with my imagined teacher, I disciplined myself to continually re-examine and re-think my use of conceptual language and thinking patterns in relation to my reflections based on my observations of my practice, the theoretical ideas of others, and my identified values. My living logic also gave me the freedom to attempt to capture my emotions.

I believe my living practical logic fits Bourdieu's final criteria of ease of use by others. As I've shared earlier in this chapter, Jack acknowledges my influence on his

practice. A number of the foundational principles of Chinook Charter School are based on the community concepts I share in this thesis. Identification of personal and professional values are now an integral part of my educational practices with preservice teachers.

I have created an alternative to the traditional form of criticism, which is based on my values and belief in community. Throughout this thesis, I demonstrate how to move past the paradigm wars (Donmoyer, 1996), and I believe I offer one answer to Desforge's (2000) concern about the adverse and abundant criticism found in education. By using creativity, I show how I can meaningfully and respectfully engage with the ideas of others and when necessary, illustrate places of difference while continuing to live my values. My responses to teacher educators in Chapter 9 illustrate how I live my values as I respond to their views.

Finally, I realize my joy in education is based on my continual active learning. In one of my messages to Jack, I wrote

> What continually reoccurs is the aspect of the living. Living theory, living my practice, living my values, making my representation more than conceptual and embracing different ways to capture the "living", and creating my own living knowledge. That's exciting!

I began this thesis by sharing the Alaskan winter with you, and last night was our first snow of the this particular winter. Alaska continues to live through its annual cycles, one rolling one to the next, sometimes rough and tumble, sometimes gently, but always continuing. Our journey together has sometimes been gently reassuring and sometimes my realizations caused me to gasp, but we continued on. Robert Service (1916) writes of a winter night, "There's a whisper on the night-wind, there's a star agleam to guide us, and the Wild is calling, calling...let us go" (39). There's so much more to discover, let us go.

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Minor Amendments Following the Viva-Voce Examination with Professors Marion Dadds and Helen Haste on 29th January 2001

This amendment is in response to a request made by my examiners Marion Dadds and Helen Haste. While directed specifically to me about my work presented here, I believe it also has broader ethical implications for others engaged in self-study.

Kushner (2000) points out that being ethical or making ethical decisions take place in the context of action'(176). Tensions can develop for the researcher as she feels the tug and pull of balancing personal and professional values, weighing decisions against universal beliefs and day-to-day actions, and working among the waves of pressure within the social context. This aptly describes my situation at Richardson Elementary leading up to the reading program adoption as I described in Chapter 6. In that chapter I show my efforts to influence others as I attempt to live my values while being in the context of action.

My other aim was to make the retelling so vivid, you the reader, would feel my deep tensions surrounding this specific situation. I also attempted to bring you into the moment by including description of the process in which the reading program was being considered, by detailing my response to the political and social actions surrounding this event, and more specifically, by adding my internal thoughts including my personal journal entries which were written while in the 'context of action'. In doing so, I wanted to honestly show my difficult ethical struggle with the changes happening in the school.

The specific section in question includes an excerpt from my journal. In it I questioned my ability to work with teachers who, in my estimation at the time, weren't interested in being thoughtful educators. The excerpt reads:

'I can't teach here! How can I work with people who seem to no want to think of work at teaching? Or see any value in their own efforts? It's a building of people who want to read teacher manuals. How can I face these people day after day now that I know how they truly think and feel. I'm indescribably disappointed and lost.'

This particular journal entry was written in anger and frustration in my not being able to understand the other teachers' positions. I was totally immersed in a situation that violated my personal values and beliefs and my writing illustrates my internal struggle.

Including such strongly worded statements presents a very real ethical dilemma. As I explained above, I wanted you to hear and feel my incredible tension within this situation. But, on the other hand, I am talking about fellow educators. Where does my responsibility lie?

I believe this to be a very difficult issue and I attempted to resolve it by showing my thoughts through italicized print. By making my thoughts visually different, I assumed the reader would understand they were my authentic reactions to the moment. My examiners, Marion Dadds and Helen Haste, questioned my reasoning with this. They felt the writing is injurious to those specific educators, and for that reason, I removed the section from the body of the text with the intent of addressing the issue in this amendment.

A number of years ago, I read an article questioning the silences within teacher research narratives (Newkirk, 1992). Newkirk questions the 'perfect' teacher research story, where the children produce deeply moving work, the teachers never show impatience or frustration, and the results of the research always show improvement. Since reading this, I've thought considerably about Newkirk's concern. One of the inherent tensions in the writing of my research was, and continues to be, how to present a truthful and realistic account and still maintain my values? I've wondered about the placement of that fragile line between honestly sharing one's thoughts to give depth and truthfulness to the study, and not causing distress to another.

In an effort to create an accurate and truthful account of my research, I adopted two generally enacted research procedures. Both relied on dialogue. First, as I gathered my data and began to examine it in relation to my questions, my values, and my actions, I engaged in discussions with my colleagues. The ATRN group was highly influential in the initial process. Since we gathered together for two Saturdays each month, they had an on-going sense of my direction, knew the circumstances of the study, and were familiar with the general school environment in which I was working. Because of such a familiar context, together we were able to continue a very fluent and continuing examination of my data, analysis, and suppositions all balanced against my beliefs. Their insights and questioning helped me move away from the immediacy of my work and look at it with a new view.

Later, as my work moved from the specific communities to the broader educational world, I added others to help me in maintaining a sharper focus. I asked educators I met at conferences who shared a similar teacher research philosophy to read parts of the

texts and offer their thoughts. Bath and S-Step colleagues also responded to various sections of my work.

The second procedure of my validation process included the people within the specific communities. Since I wrote the account of creating community within my classroom first, the children became my first examiners. My questions to them always revolved around accuracy and truth. 'Does this represent what really is happening here?', 'Is this an accurate picture?' They were extremely truthful and blunt. In sharing my writing and asking for honest answers, I was able to live my values of being a reflective community member.

I repeated this same action for each community. With the parent community, I asked several families to review portions of Chapter 4. Their suggestions were helpful in making my narrative more accurate. Two teachers from Richardson read and made suggestions on Chapter 5. ATRN's continuing conversation influenced the form and content for Chapter 7.

I took a different approach to Chapter 6 where I discuss my personal reactions to the required reading program. Not only was it difficult to review the events and put them on paper, but it was as equally difficult to relive them by sharing it with the teachers within that school. Knowing that I did need to have input from someone else, I finally called one of the teachers and asked her to read parts of it.

This brings me back to the initial dilemma mentioned at the beginning of this section. What is my position here? During my viva, Professors Dadds and Haste pointed out that I wasn't living my values of care and compassion. That's true. At that moment, I

wasn't. Do I exclude accounts of those moments? How does the exclusion of such personal diary writings alter the picture of my work and myself? Yet, what is my role toward the other in situations such as this? Do I eliminate those incidents in which others might object to? How do I weight those objections in light of my purpose of the research? How strongly do I feel about the issue?

I knew I was uncertain of my position when I only had one teacher read parts of that chapter, but in the end, I chose to include my honest thoughts believing they would add to the reader's understanding of my strongly felt values. But I also realize that what I've written has the potential to cause harm to those particular educators. For the moment, other than removing the portion of the text, I'm unsure about how to resolve this issue that not only satisfies my intent and but also shows care and compassion to those educators.

Kushner (2001) recommends a flexible approach to these ethical tensions and the need to consider each situation individually. I agree. Because self-study deals with the examination of one's own practice and growth, every account will be quite individual and the distinct tensions will be unique to that professional and that specific study. This focus on the person has the potential to cause us to re-examine our notions about experience, authenticity, and the role of values and beliefs. This on-going discussion will enable us to gain a clearer understanding not only of ourselves, but also of the daily lives of teacher educators as they work to align their values with their practice within the context of their
environment.

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